A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST RE-CONCEPTUALISATION OF ADOLESCENT DELINQUENCY

By

JINA IMRIE

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SUPERVISOR: PROF. D.P. FOURIE

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ABSTRACT

Available literature reveals that most prevalently delinquency has been viewed from a modernist perspective. However, as cybernetic epistemology increased its stronghold within the field of psychology, explanations became increasingly systemic in nature. In this study a literature review is presented which articulates these approaches. This critique is followed by a comprehensive consideration of delinquency from a social constructionist stance as an alternative to modernist and early cybernetic perspectives. Examples are provided as to possible ways in which the label "delinquency" evolves within an interpersonal context, as well as the ways in which the meaning engendered is linked to broader cultural discourses. It has been acknowledged that this does not constitute *the* social constructionist perspective on delinquency, but represents some challenging ideas about how delinquency is co-created between people. Implications for therapy and research are also discussed.

The following key concepts are used: Discourse, discursive practices, rhetoric, narrative, delinquency, objectivity, epistemology, co-construction, constructionist therapy, modernism, post-modernism, language.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING "ADOLESCENT DELINQUENCY"

1. Ideas about "Delinquency"

Most people have ideas about what it means to be a "delinquent", what causes this, and what should be done to solve the problem. The most insidious source of these ideas would be the prevalent cultural discourses, that is the ideas that are propagated through the media and popular culture.

Within the social realm, friends may discuss the wayward behaviour of another's adolescent. Their conversation will probably include opinions about the cause of the problem ("Nancy just spoils Sam too much!") as well as ideas about what they believe will solve the problem ("All he needs is a good hiding!"). One need only open a newspaper or turn on the television to gain access to a journalist's view of rebellious youths or to endure a professional's rehashed opinion. The point is that it would be difficult for one not to have ideas about "delinquency".

However, both in social circles as well as in the professional realm there is no agreement about what constitutes delinquency. As an illustration, one person might attribute delinquent behaviour to poor parenting, another to poverty, whilst another might assume that the source of the "problem" is to be found within the adolescent's genetic make-up. This observation is interesting when lay ideas are compared with predominant theories. In the main, lay ideas of the general population appear to reflect the diversity found in theory, albeit in language less cloaked with scientific jargon (Semin, 1990). Predominant theories are thus perpetuated by the professional advocates of the theories, the media that bestow credibility upon these theories and by ordinary people (lay) within the context of their everyday interactions.

Adherents of these theories have attempted to locate the problem of delinquency inside the adolescent. As eluded to above, competing theories have conceptalised the problem differently – as genetic, as located within developmental problems experienced during childhood or as the effect of inappropriate learning and so on (Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1996). Each theory has embarked upon a search for the causes of "delinquency" so that the "damage" can either be undone or attempts can be made to prevent this "damage" from occurring in the first place.

This dissertation attempts to show how these theories inevitably reflect modernist assumptions which often have the effect of encouraging the infliction of blame either on the adolescent, his or her parents, or society in general. Furthermore, it is thus also an aim to show that modernism is a reductionist epistemology that cannot account for the complexities inherent in human interaction. In effect, modernist theories of delinquency have contributed to the construction of the problem through an adherence to the fundamental assumption of linear causality and the belief that "pathology" is contained within the individual. Social constructionism renounces modernist assumptions and relocates "pathology" to the discursive realm so that it becomes a relational achievement in language (Gergen, 1994). "Delinquency" is henceforth considered to be a social construction rather than a real entity existing in an objectively knowable world "out there". Reconsidering delinquency in this way implies new and different solutions to the defined problem.

It is thus the contention that modernist theories are limited in their relative utility and that a more useful approach is a relational stance that considers the contextual factors that contribute to the development of "delinquency". Modernism ignores these factors and through its limited self-awareness it actively constructs the very problem that it attempts to understand, predict and control (Gergen, 1978). The dissertation therefore embodies a reconsideration of

delinquency as a social construction as well as the implications of such a reconsideration.

2. The organisation of this dissertation

The dissertation embarks upon an epistemological journey in Chapter 2. The metamorphosis unfolds as epistemology evolves from modernism, to first order cybernetics, to second order cybernetics, and then through to social constructionism. The latter epistemological stance informs the author of this dissertation and its presentation within the second chapter is designed to provide the reader with a lens through which to consider current theory regarding "delinquency". The former epistemologies serve to make explicit the epistemological assumptions sculpting these theories.

It is armed with the epistemological foundations that current theoretical stances are presented. A literature review is thus elucidated in Chapter 3. It is within this chapter that the reader will be introduced to the culturally prevalent discourses informing our ideas about delinquency. It is also the context wherein the reader can begin to consider the socially constructed nature of "delinquency".

Within Chapter 4, the socially constructed nature of "delinquency" is explicitly illuminated as it is explicated how actions acquire the meaning of "rebellion" or "delinquent" within interpersonal interaction. Furthermore, the chapter also explores how these meanings are embedded within culturally prevalent discourses. The therapeutic implications of these ideas are considered. Further, a modernist research example is discussed from the perspective of social constructionism to highlight the differences between these perspectives as well as to consider the pragmatic aspects of constructionism.

Future recommendations for treatment and research from a social constructionist stance are considered in Chapter 5, as well as the self-reflexive nature of the author's perspective on the social construction of delinquency.

Chapter 2

An Epistemological Metamorphosis; From Modernism through Cybernetics toward Social Constructionism

1. Introduction

How is it that we come to know the world around us? How do we develop ideas about ourselves and about others? How do we come to understand how others and ourselves behave? These and other questions may be answered by way of concerning ourselves with epistemology.

Auerswald (1985) defines epistemology as "the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge" and goes on to say that it is "a set of imminent rules used in thought by large numbers of people to define reality" (p. 1). Keeney (1983) uses the term "epistemology" to indicate the basic premises underlying action and cognition (as did Bateson). The deepest order of change that humans are capable of demonstrating is epistemological change, which means transforming the way one experiences the world. He asserts that epistemology is concerned with the rules of operation that govern cognition. Epistemology, by definition, thereby attempts to specify how people or communities of people know, think and decide.

As such, the study of epistemology is a way of recognising how people come to construct and maintain the manner in which they make sense of the world. It is impossible for one not to have an epistemology. In other words, our epistemology influences how it is that we see the world, it has an impact on the kinds of distinctions that we draw, and hence on what we come to know as "reality". Our epistemology constructs the "lens" through which we view the world

and ourselves; it is the birthplace of our guiding assumptions. But why is it necessary to include a discussion of epistemology within the context of this dissertation?

Theory development is fuelled by epistemological considerations and is thus a reflection of particular underlying assumptions. The theories that we develop in the endeavour to understand human functioning are firmly entrenched within a defining epistemology. There are therefore limitations inherent in any particular theory.

By implication, any theoretical exposition of delinquency emanates from within a particular guiding, and yet limiting, epistemology. A consideration of the epistemological assumptions allows one to become aware of these limitations. It also allows one to highlight conceptual differences between and among theories, despite their emergence from conflicting epistemologies. In short, such an enterprise structures our reading of theory, exposing implicit assumptions, as well as providing a basis for both critique and comparison across diverse theoretical perspectives.

The importance of considering epistemology is enhanced when it is considered that the present dissertation constitutes an epistemological shift from previous delinquency theory. The reader is invited along on this epistemological journey, equipped with the guiding assumptions inherent in the approaches discussed. Consequently, the evolution is traced through from modernism, to first order cybernetics, and then through to second order cybernetics. It is the contention that second order cybernetics represents the springboard in the evolution toward social constructionism. The chapter concludes with a discussion of social constructionist epistemology.

2. Modernism

The enlightenment period brought with it a reaction to the romanticism of the 18th century. Before the reign of modernism, the individual was seen as a slave to the unpredictable effects of his or her emotions, thus unable to make rational decisions (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). The enlightenment period, a fertile ground for the development of thinkers such as Locke, Hume and Descartes, ushered in a new era that characterised the defining feature of the individual as the capacity for reasoning. Armed with this "new ability", the individual was capable of observing a logically ordered reality that exists independently of human discourse (Anderson, 1996).

It is the relationship between reason and the presumption of an independent reality that has ensured that reason is privileged in the pursuit of gaining knowledge of an "out there material reality" from within the modernist stance. Acquiring knowledge of a knowable world is not merely regarded as an intellectual or academic exercise. To the contrary, the acquisition of knowledge is seen as imperative since knowledge of the world means that the world can be controlled (Anderson, 1996; Gergen, 1994). The modernist conception of knowledge is hence that a rational, scientific approach has the capacity to develop a coherent and accurate account of the "way things really are". What is the scientific method?

Congruent with the assumption that it is possible to objectively (and hence accurately) describe the world, it is asserted that research should be objective (Hoffman, 1991). In this way descriptions compete as they strive to develop and utilise methods which will yield a "truthful" account of an objective world. The methods utilised are designed to exclude extraneous variables, so that phenomena can be observed in their "true" form. Modernism thereby suggests and encourages a quest for "the truth".

Implied within the above is the modernist principle of reductionism. This is a process whereby complex phenomena (for example, delinquency) can best be understood by reducing phenomena to their smallest most fundamental parts (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). It is assumed that once these parts are objectively analysed an understanding of the whole can be obtained through ascertaining the way in which these parts fit and function together.

Intrinsic to this process is one of the defining features of modernism – linear causality. Through the endeavour to elucidate the processes that define phenomena and accurately describe how it is that they function, the observer is thereby compelled by virtue of his or her epistemological affiliations to uncover linear causal processes. For example, to illuminate the operational processes of the human mind the researcher will reduce the mind into smaller components (such as the conscious and unconscious mind). The researcher might then "discover" that repressed memories held within the unconscious mind (A) cause the individual to develop symptoms, such as anxiety or psychosis (B). Therefore, A is the linear cause for B.

It is through these processes that the social scientist is furnished with knowledge of objective reality. Knowing the contours of the objective world allows one to transcend the ambiguities and inconsistencies of perpetually changing circumstances and to move toward a self-determined prosperity (Anderson, 1996; Gergen, 1994). It renders the world predictable and thereby controllable. Herein enters the concept of power. Once knowledge of the world (and the human mind) is gathered the processes involved in its functioning can be utilised to exercise unilateral control over the phenomenon in question. This is by virtue of manipulating the variables that constitutes the equation of cause and effect. The equation of linear causality enables the scientist to make predications about the future. If empirical support is "discovered" that supports the research hypothesis it is perceived as confirmatory evidence that not only is reality objective but it can also be predicted. The conclusion that is implied by virtue of accurate predication is that reality is beyond doubt accessible through the

rigorous application of empirical methodology which in turn inspires the belief that reality can be controlled and manipulated.

Within the field of psychology, an important consideration for the social scientist has been the concept of self. Although there are numerous theoretical perspectives on the constituents of the self or mind, all modernist theories hold one assumption in common - that of a psychological realm of the self that perceives, reasons, deliberates, and decides, as already indicated. This sentiment translated into philosophical terms indicates the modernist commitment to a dualist ontology (the conceptual distinction between the reality of mind and the reality of the material world) (Gergen, 1994). One of the most formidable challenges to the modernist assumption of dualism is captured by the following question; how does individual consciousness come to have knowledge of the external world?

Stumpf (1982) asserts that philosophers have grappled and deliberated on this problem for over 2000 years. Modernist thinkers in particular sought to resolve this epistemological dilemma. Their collective efforts yielded the metaphor that the mind functions as a mirror to nature (Gergen, 1994; Rorty, 1991). Attempts to justify the view of mind as mirror is known as empiricism. Through this process objective research renders objective accounts of the world, thus proving the view that the mind functions as a mirror. Furthermore, the implicit role of language in the dissemination of ideas and knowledge is that language also has the capacity to mirror reality. Language contains meaning. Words are thus used to denote objects and the relationship between objects. All that is required for the achievement of understanding is that the meaning of words is learned.

It is the core assumptions of modernism that have been obliterated by the systemic challenge. How can we be sure that we can accurately mirror reality? Is it not impossible to stand outside of language in the endeavour to check that our words accurately capture the contours of the "real world"? Can linear causality really capture the complexity of causal relationships within a

multifaceted world? Still, how would we know that these linear explanations are "true"? It is from the field of such discontent that the cybernetic perspective took root.

3. Cybernetic Epistemology

Cybernetic thinking arose in the midst of criticism lodged against the assumptions of the modernist tradition. The shift was linked to developments taking place in other disciplines – physics, biology, mathematics and the cognitive sciences that have emerged from computer technology (Hoffman, 1981). Figures seminal in the initial development of this epistemology included information theorist Claude Shannon, cybernetician Norbert Wiener, general systems theorist Ludwig von Bertalanffy and anthropologist Gregory Bateson. Bateson's influential role stemmed from his synthesis of ideas from divergent sources in explicating their usefulness in terms of understanding communication processes. What is cybernetics?

The term "cybernetics" was first introduced by Wiener (Barker, 1986) to refer to a regulatory system which operates by means of feedback mechanisms. Keeney (1983) asserts that cybernetics belongs to the science of pattern and organisation. He sees this as distinct from any search for material essences or forces of nature (which is the concern of modernism). The shift thus refocuses attention from essence to patterns of organisation.

According to Keeney (1983), cybernetics challenges the modernist approach, laying bear its limitations. The modernist or linear paradigm places its emphasis on the individual, whilst largely ignoring relationship factors. Locating pathology within the individual means that the relationship dynamics between people are under-emphasised. The emphasis within cybernetics in on the patterns which connect (Bateson, 1972). Consequently, the cybernetic perspective offers a more comprehensive or useful understanding of human functioning. For

example, from a modernist perspective, symptoms of anxiety will be located within an individual. Perhaps it is assumed that Neil is anxious whilst in strange places (B) because of a traumatic experience in an unfamiliar context during childhood (A). A thus causes B. From a cybernetic perspective, the focus is redirected to the relationship dynamics within the individual's life. The factors maintaining the anxiety in the present become a point of concern. As the "lens" broadens, it might become apparent that Neil's anxiety ensures that his wife accompanies him when the need arises for him to interact within an unfamiliar context. This then has the effect of alleviating his anxiety as his wife takes the lead in introducing both of them to strangers. If he were not anxious, his wife might attend her social club instead. It is thus evident that an approach which emphasises relationships highlights how the behaviour fits into the interpersonal realm. In other words, it highlights how the behaviour fits into the context in which it is found.

Furthermore, the shift to relationship dynamics provides the context for the consideration of circular causality. Circular causality insinuates that causality is reciprocal as factors mutually influence each other. As seen above, from the perspective of linear causality, event A can be isolated as the cause of event B. For example, bad parenting can be considered as a cause for delinquency. However, from a cybernetic perspective, A and B exist in the context of mutual and reciprocal influence, where both are equally cause and effect (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Bad parenting and delinquency are found to co-exist within a particular context but the causative relationship is circular and complex. For instance, John may claim that he acts out to obtain attention from his neglectful parents. However, his parents may argue that they try to distance themselves from John and the trouble he creates since they feel that they are powerless to do anything to change the situation, for them nothing seems to work. However, within this scenario it is impossible to say which factor is cause and which is effect. From observing the way in which they interact with each other it might appear that both stances exacerbate the problem thus both simultaneously constituting both cause and effect.

With the use of a cybernetic perspective, the "lens" of the observer is broadened, so that complex, interacting, reciprocal relationships come "into focus". These relationships are not visible through the "linear lens". However, the impression has thus far been created that cybernetics represents one undifferentiated epistemology. This, however, is not the case. Cybernetic epistemology has evolved from a first order approach, through to second order cybernetics. The discussion which follows will show how both these strands of epistemology are both separated and connected.

3.1 First Order Cybernetics

As mentioned above, cybernetic epistemology shifts its attention to the interactional processes between people. People and events are seen within the context of reciprocal patterns of interaction and therefore mutual influence. The cybernetic perspective thus deals with recursive organisation (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Examining individuals in isolation fails to capture these patterns of recursiveness and behavioural stances risk becoming reified as personality traits.

An example will serve to illustrate this point. Mrs Robinson may complain that her husband is reclusive, that he withdraws from her affections and prefers to spend time away from the family. A focus solely on Mr Robinson may lead to the development of labels such as "introversion", "shyness" or perhaps even "avoidance". However, once the focus shifts to the relationship between Mr and Mrs Robinson, it might emerge that Mr Robinson's behaviour makes sense when viewed in context. This observation may reveal that Mr Robinson is responding to how he perceives his wife to be behaving toward him. It may seem to him that she nags him almost constantly. Mr Robinson may assert that he withdraws in an attempt to avoid her nagging, a factor which he sees as the cause of the problem. Mrs Robinson may state that she nags her husband because he spends so much time away from home, thereby blaming Mr Robinson as the

cause of the problem. Their behaviours are thus interconnected. One is considered to be the cause for the other's behaviour. Causality is hence mutual. Their mutual attempts to solve the problem are operating in such a way as to sustain the problem - whilst Mrs Robinson continues to nag, Mr Robinson will continue to feel that he has no other option but to withdraw, and vice versa. As such, the relationship may be defined as complementary as they both exchange different or complementary types of behaviour. Specifically, a nagging-withdrawal relationship pattern has developed. It is important to note that within this process no reference is made to internal personality traits that may become reified or, in other words, promoted to the status of the "really real".

From the perspective of first order cybernetics, the complex interrelated network of mutually influencing individuals necessitates a shift from linear to circular causation or reciprocal causality (Cottone, 1989). Isolating any specific cause becomes problematic within this context (as seen above). Problems are embedded within the circular redundant interactional patterns between people, and are thus a natural outgrowth of this context. Consequently the validity of blame is obliterated. Responsibility is shared within the context of bilateral or mutual influence. Furthermore, the futility of a search for past causes becomes apparent as the problem-maintaining relationship patterns operating in the present assume increased importance. What does this process look like in practice?

Take, for example, the nagging-withdrawing complementary relationship pattern described above. As became apparent above, a focus on the relationship might reveal that the more the wife nags, the more her husband withdraws, and vice versa. The way in which they interact in the present is sufficient to sustain the problem, however it has become differentially defined by the participants. There is no need to embark upon a search into the past to explain their current interaction since the self-maintaining nature of the interactional pattern is located within the present. A delineation of the interactional process has provided an explanation as to how the problem is presently sustained.

The metaphor of a "system" is intrinsic to this perspective. A system is defined as "any unit containing a feedback structure and therefore competent to process information" (Keeney,1979, p. 120). These systems are considered to be hierarchically organised and each becomes a part of the context for the other. The family system can be conceptualised as a subsystem of the larger community system, and the community system a subsystem of society at large. Other families with which a family interacts become a part of the family's context. The family, as well as the individuals who constitute a family, interact with its context in a reciprocal manner. However, how does the family maintain itself? What are the processes that maintain reciprocal patterns of interaction?

These duties are entrusted to feedback mechanisms, the self-corrective and survival mechanisms of the system. Feedback is information which is fed into and out of a system in a circular manner. An important point in this regard is that these mechanisms are not endowed with the power of causation, but rather are descriptive terms. The observer punctuates the observed in terms of feedback processes and these processes can be seen to have an organising or disorganising effect on interactional processes. Furthermore, this feedback can be either positive or negative in nature from the level of first order cybernetics (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Positive feedback describes a pattern whereby the information fed back into a system reveals that a change has taken place. Negative feedback reveals that the status quo has been maintained. Although essentially homeostatic cycles (negative feedback) are conceptualised as maintaining a problem within a family, neither state is intrinsically preferred. The appropriateness of the type of feedback is rather contingent upon context. Stability (and thus negative feedback) might be pertinent in one, whilst change (positive feedback) might be more useful in another.

Yet again, an example may serve to illustrate this point. A family with conservative religious beliefs might function quite well within an environment where similar families surround them. An observer may state that the family is

receiving the feedback that they are a good, morally steadfast family. This feedback will more than likely have a stabilising effect on the family - they will engage in more of the same and the status quo will be maintained (negative feedback). However, in the event that the family is forced to relocate, for example due to the husband's or wife's work commitments, the situation might change. Like-thinking families may no longer surround the family. Rather, they may find that they are now submerged within the context of liberal families who concern themselves far less with strict, or perhaps different, religious convictions. The family may then receive the feedback that they are "old-fashioned", "reserved" or "stuck-up". In turn, this may have a disorganising effect on the family, changing the status quo (positive feedback). This may take the form of the family either strengthening and reinforcing family boundaries, augmenting and rigidifying conservative interactional patterns, or perhaps it may have the effect of the family losing much of their religious or conservative identity as they attempt to co-exist within their new environment. The healthy family will find a new balance within this context, so that the functioning of the system becomes once again stable, a new status quo thereby being developed and maintained. To change too much or to refuse to change at all might lead to problematic outcomes for the family. It is also clear from this example that the feedback mechanisms are inferred from the interactional processes taking place within the family, as well as between the family members and the surrounding environment.

It thus follows that first order cybernetics emphasises the importance of considering the powerful effects of context. Essentially, context refers to place, relationship and time. In other words, whom we are with, where we are, and the time of the interaction constitutes the context (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Context defines or suggests the ways in which we could or should relate to others and thus has a powerful influence on the types of interaction that may or may not take place. For instance, Julie will not behave in the same way whilst at work and whilst at a party. It is appropriate for her to dress smartly at work and behave in a professional manner. However, at a party she might wear a daring outfit whilst she dances on the tables with her friends.

Moreover, a focus on both stability and change is a hallmark of cybernetic theory (Keeney, 1983). Both are required for the "healthy" functioning of systems, extremes are considered undesirable (recall the example of the family above). Morphostasis refers to the tendency of a system to remain stable, but within a context of change. Conversely, morphogenesis describes a system which is changing, within the context of stability. Too much change too quickly, or a refusal to change when it is appropriate may lead to problematic interactional patterns. For example, consider the religious family presented above.

A defining characteristic of first order cybernetics is that the observer of systemic processes is able to discern the rules and processes of a system. An identification of these reveals the manner in which relationships are defined within the system, who may relate to whom, and in what way. The boundaries between systems and subsystems are also illuminated as these rules are observed, and as inter-systemic processes are identified.

It thus becomes apparent that the observer stands outside of the system and is able to identify interactional patterns and processes, feedback mechanisms, rules and boundaries. It is herein that an epistemological contradiction emerges. There is an assumption that the distinctions we draw and the manner in which we punctuate events influences our view of the world and our interactions with the world (Keeney, 1982; 1983). We cannot see the world as it really is, we construct it subjectively. We only know the effects of our behaviour through the feedback we receive. We cannot step outside of our own subjective experience to check that reality has been mirrored correctly. Reality is thus constituted by a multiverse (each person constructing their own reality), as opposed to a universe (where everyone is required to know the same reality in the same way). Nevertheless, the observer's view of a system is in danger of becoming reified or defined as real and true if it is considered to be the correct view, if it is assumed that it is possible for one to stand on the outside and objectively observe (Bogdan, 1984). The mutual influence between observer and observed is

ignored and the perspective thereby contradicts its own assumptions. This fatal blow along with other criticisms led to the development of second order cybernetics.

3.2 Second Order Cybernetics

Although the first order approach retains its usefulness in specific circumstances (Atkinson & Heath, 1990), the second order, or ecosystemic perspective moves beyond this limited punctuation (Keeney,1979; 1983). Essentially, ecosystemic epistemology encompasses cybernetics, ecology and systems theory (Keeney, 1979) and once again the focus is on the patterns which connect all those involved in problem definition (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982). It incorporates an awareness of a broader ecology. The growing awareness of the therapist's influence on his or her observations provided the impetus for the development of the second cybernetics (Hoffman, 1980). The connectedness between observer and observed is hence sacred from a second order approach and the implications thereof have substantial ramifications for the conceptualisation of human interaction. It is this aspect that represents the fundamental shift between a first and a second order perspective.

A consequence of this shift is that the second order perspective is concerned with the "epistemology of participation" (Varela, in Hoffman, 1985, p. 386), or as Keeney (1983) states, an ethic of observing. The modernist assumption which privileges objective observation is considered to be a "pathology of epistemology" (Becvar & Becvar, 1996, p. 355) and is hence impossible. According to second order thinking (as well as first order thinking) what we see is influenced by the manner in which we draw distinctions, by the way in which we punctuate that which is observed. It can never be a true reflection of the world "out there". The "lens" through which we see the world is influenced by our own personal history, that is the contexts in which we are historically and presently embedded.

Consider for example one's perspective on the catastrophe of the world trade centre towers on September 11th last year. Ideas regarding the moral issues concerned are likely to differ between a member of the Taliban and an American citizen. Thus, according to Hoffman (1985) "Our ideas about the world are shared ideas, consensually arrived at and mediated through givens like culture and language" (p. 384).

One of the important ramifications of this assumption is that perspectives are self-referential- they say more about us, and the way that we think, than they do about what we are observing (Keeney, 1979). For example, there is no correct perspective on the September 11th incident but through listening to an observer one would become aware of the speaker's perspective, and possibly their political ideas. We cannot invoke the idea of an independent and objective "reality" as a yardstick against which we can measure the truth-value of each perspective, and thus the utility of such an endeavour becomes questionable. Instead, perspectives are assessed in accordance with their usefulness to the situation at hand. Consider how useful it would be for a Taliban member to agree with the ideals of the USA should he or she wish to continue his or her commitment to that organisation.

The implication contained in the inherent connectedness between observer and observed is that systems are closed. Maturana and Varela state that consequently there can be no reference to an outside system (Maturana & Varela, 1987). There is no feedback from external systems and the highest level of recursion defines the system itself: the system does what it does in order to do what it does. The system becomes its own best explanation. In other words, there are no goals that can be defined by an outside observer, systemic processes rather operate to maintain the system and an observer within the system can only infer goals. These goals will then be self-referential and hence reveal more about the observer than any truth-value regarding the system's goals. This self-defining and self-generating nature of autonomous systems is

referred to as autopoiesis (Efran, Lukens & Lukens, 1990; Hoffman, 1985). What exactly does this mean in practice?

In therapy the system includes all those thinking about the problem. If Joe has no idea that a problem exists, then he is not part of the problem-determined system. The system is closed. However if Nancy tells Joe about the problem he consequently becomes a member of the system. Thus, systems are not set in concrete but their specifications depend on how the "observer" defines the system. As we each construct our own ideas of the world around us we define systems differently. When Joe talks about the family and Nancy talks about the family, they are both referring to a different family, since they do not perceive of and construct it in the same way. There is a fluidity to systems at the level of second order cybernetics since they exist in the eye of the beholder as opposed to within an external, knowable reality.

Maturana proposes that autonomous systems are self-determined (Efran, et al., 1990). In other words, the way the system is structured limits what it can and cannot do. The specific characteristics of those members who constitute a system imbue it with its character and it is the way in which these members interact, as well as the alternatives which are available to them, which will influence the functioning of the system. These possibilities are in turn constrained by the context in which the system operates (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Unilateral change is therefore impossible and one can only perturb a system. This system will then respond in accordance with its structural make-up.

In addition to this, the replacement of the observer-observed dichotomy with an observing system stance suggests that systems can no longer be justifiably reified. As previously mentioned, systems, as well as ideas regarding functionality and dysfunctionality, exist within the eye of the beholder. As a result, different and equally plausible distinctions can be drawn regarding the same "system". These distinctions and descriptions may have differing effects on the system's functioning. Bogdan has advocated that systemic organisation,

such as family organisation, be re-conceptualised as an ecology of ideas rather than in terms such as structure and rules, which he states may lead to the reification of such organisation (Bogdan, 1984).

Moreover, the relationship between system and problem is re-conceptualised from a second order perspective. Rather than the system being seen as creating the problem, the problem is conceptualised as creating the system (Hoffman, 1985; 1990). Hoffman states that the problem is relocated from being within the family to being inside the heads of everyone who is playing a part in specifying the problem. "The problem is the meaning system created by the distress and the treatment unit is everyone who is contributing to that meaning system. This includes the treating professional as soon as the client walks in the door" (Hoffman, 1985, p. 387). These ideas will become clearer as the discussion matures throughout the following chapter.

The idea of the family as a cybernetic system is thereby challenged (Golan, 1988; Hoffman, 1985). The client is no longer the sole focus of treatment, but rather the focus shifts to the evolving meaning-making system which includes the treating professionals. Therapy can thereby be re-conceptualised as a conversational domain. Furthermore, due to the assumption that systems can only be perturbed and not changed, Hoffman advocates setting a context for change rather than specifying specific changes, as well as modifying premises and assumptions instead of focusing on specific behaviours (Atkinson & Heath, 1990). Within this perspective, therapists do not assume that their views are "true" or objective, view them as constructed from their limited viewpoints. Clients are therefore no longer obliged to accept the opinion of the therapist, but may find such "meaningful noise" (Keeney, 1983) helpful if they are able to hear it. "Meaningful noise" is new information provided to the client, that is new enough to have a significant effect, yet familiar enough to avoid outright rejection. Of course, the information also needs to be meaningful within the context of the client's life. Thus the importance of the therapist becoming familiar with the client's world-view. The role of language hence comes to the fore. Anderson

and Goolishian (1988) have been among the pioneers ushering in the salient role of language in the co-creation of meaning, and consequently problem definition.

It is thus clear that the positions of both therapist and client (observer and observed) have been radically altered within second order cybernetics. Their connection is celebrated and the influential role of the therapist on that which is observed is made salient. Therapists need to be self-reflexive, continuously monitoring their own personal investment in their determination to produce change (Atkinson & Heath, 1990). They should also be aware of the influence of their own assumptions about what should change as well as the influence of their conceptualisation of the problem. The rug of certainty is pulled out from beneath both therapist and client (Dell, 1986) as they tentatively struggle together to find new meaning and ways of living.

To sum up then, Hoffman (1985) advocates the following assumptions as rudimentary to any therapy which is congruent with a second order epistemology:

a) An observing system stance: the therapeutic system thus comprising clients and therapist.
b) The abolishment of a hierarchical structure in favour of a collaborative stance.
c) The establishment of goals that emphasise setting a context for change rather than specifying a change.
d) An endeavour to guard against too much instrumentality.
e) A circular understanding of the problem.
f) A non-judgmental and non-pejorative stance.

There is much debate regarding whether the postmodern turn represents a shift outside of second order cybernetics, or is simply a continuation thereof (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). It is the author's opinion that second order, or ecosystemic epistemology, does not sufficiently concern itself with the role of language and the co-construction of meaning between people in relationship. A focus solely on

interactional process fails to capture the fluidity of meaning. Second order thinking begins to delve into these areas, but it has not gone far enough into these territories. Furthermore, it diminishes the role of discourse and perceptions of power dynamics which play themselves out in the context of our society. It is to this end that social constructionism takes centre stage.

4. Social Constructionism

4.1 Language

The social constructionist stance departs from the modernist conception of language as a "tool" which is used to capture and communicate an accurate or objective account of the world. It also departs with the traditional definition of the term "language". It is extended and expanded to include communication through signs, structure or style. Anderson and Goolishian (1988) emphasise the difference between their use of "language" and that traditionally used within the field of psycholinguistics by speaking of "being in language". They refer to "languaging" as a dynamic, social operation through which we maintain meaningful human contact and are able to share a reality (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Mills in Shotter & Gergen, 1989).

Anderson and Goolishian (1988) understand human systems as mutually evolving their own language within the context of social interaction. Social constructionism is congruent with this idea as it moves toward language as constitutive of relationship. It is more than just a way of connecting people, more than just a "tool" of communication. People exist in language. Hence the focus is not on the individual person but on the social interaction in which language is generated, sustained, and abandoned (Gergen & Gergen, 1981). Language and meaning constitutes people's lives (White, 1991).

4.2 Language, Meaning and Relationship

As mentioned above, from a modernist perspective language is used to reflect reality; it mirrors the world within which we live. Language thus contains meaning, and knowledge regarding the definition of words is sufficient to render a conversation intelligible to all the participants. Effectively then, within the modernist paradigm meaning is conceptualised as originating within the individual mind. However, if meaning is not seen to be contained within language, nor within the mind of the individual, then how is it that we can come to mean anything at all?

Anderson and Goolishian (1988) attempt to answer this question by asserting that meaning and understanding are constructed socially and intersubjectively. By "intersubjective" they are referring to "an evolving state of affairs in which two or more people agree (understand) that they are experiencing the same events in the same way." (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, p. 372). This meaning is open to dispute and therefore to re-negotiation. In fact, Anderson and Goolishian (1988) add that that "meaning and understanding do not exist prior to the utterances of language" (p. 378), but rather, come into being within language. Language hence constitutes meaning and life is experienced within language. Meaning is thus created in and through dialogue. How does this happen?

To answering this question it is important to turn first to Wittgenstein (in Gergen & Kaye, 1992) who argues that words gain their meaning through their use in social interchange and not through their capacity to picture reality. We are engaged in games of language and it is by virtue of their use within these games that words acquire meaning. Language games are embedded within broader forms of life / life games. That is, the forms of interchange in which words are embedded give them value. This is not, however, limited to the linguistic realm but may include all our actions and various objects in our surroundings (verbal and nonverbal aspects). However, what is the link between language games and meaning?

To reiterate, language constitutes meaning. Meaning is not to be found within the mind of the individual, but within the context of a relationship. According to Gergen (1999) meaning is "an emergent property of co-ordinated action" (p. 145). An example he uses to illustrate this point is a typical greeting ritual. Person A may approach person B on the street and extend his or her hand. Person B may then proceed to grasp person A's hand, giving his or her gesture meaning (as a greeting or the "greeting game"). However, person B may also choose to ignore the hand and pull person A closer to embrace him or her. This generates another meaning for exactly the same action (a handshake is not sufficient for a friendship that is so close). The way in which person B co-ordinates him or herself to the actions of person A thus functions as a supplement in that is ascribes meaning to an action which it alone lacks.

In isolation, one cannot mean anything; it is through the way that actions are co-ordinated with each other, through the ways in which they are supplemented (through the process of mutual supplementation), that meaning is generated. Meaning is thus never under our control, we need others in order to render our actions meaningful. Shotter (in Gergen, 1999) adds to this by stating that meaning is generated from within joint-action, and not from action and reaction. The focus is thus on the relationship, and not on the behaviour of two separate individuals involved in one interactional sequence.

Gergen (1999) extends the idea of meaning negotiated in relationship to include a cultural and historical element. He asserts that we carry with us the sum of all our relationships rooted in the past. This relationship history provides the pool from which we draw our repertoires of action and supplement. It is through our history of relatedness that an action is a candidate for a particular kind of meaning (for example, an extended hand invites the meaning "greeting" to be ascribed to the action). On that account meaning is thus not only negotiated within the context of the current interaction, but is also shaped by the interlocutor's histories of relationship. This applies to both action and supplement.

As an example of the influence of culture, it might be useful to consider how the words that we use emanate from within the context of our cultural heritage. They limit what we can come to know, what we are able to talk about, and the ideas that we can have whilst reflecting on our experiences. For me snow is snow, there is only one variety, it all looks the same to me. I can only reflect on the "fact" that it is snowing, it is all white, perhaps it takes on an aesthetic value for me, I think it looks beautiful. Perhaps if you are an Eskimo your experience will be quite different. For you there are many varieties of snow and it may be important to be able to distinguish between them. You are thus able to reflect on these varieties, an expansion outside of my repertoire. The type of snow may take on increased importance for you should you be able to surmise the type of weather to follow from the specific subtype identified. The phenomenon may thus take on a pragmatic value for you. Language and culture are hence inseparable and their effect on our experience and way of constructing our world is clear.

The cultural and historical embeddedness of our experiences and our language suggests that meaning is precariously situated in the context of relationship. For me, a British person, the words "just now" mean that something happened moments previously. Two British individuals interacting will agree on this definition of meaning. However, within the South African context, "just now" indicates that something is still going to happen, within the next couple of moments. Two South Africans communicating will agree that this is the correct definition of the phrase. The situation becomes more complicated should a British and a South African person mutter this phrase in the context of a conversation. There will be initial confusion as to what is actually meant. However, the two interactants will probably reach some consensus as to what these words will mean in the context of their relationship, or perhaps they may even dispense with this phrase and construct another.

It is thus clear that meaning cannot be taken for granted. It is not an intrinsic value of the words themselves but is negotiated within the context of a relationship. Meaning is fluid and can change within the process of moment to moment human interchange. Gergen (1999) refers to this as the "continuous refashioning" of meaning. These ideas are explored more fully in Chapter 4.

Moreover, this perspective regarding the generation of meaning in relationships has implications for how understanding is conceptualised from within a social constructionist position. Understanding is not about attempting to access another's subjective experience or meaning that is generated from with the individual mind. Rather, as meaning is established relationally so is understanding. Our understanding is embedded within negotiated meanings and thus failure to understand represents a "breach in the common scenario of relationship" (Gergen, 1999, p. 147).

4.3 Language as Rhetoric

Rhetoric has been referred to as the art of persuasion (Gergen, 1999). Cicero (in Gergen, 1999) stated that "rhetoric is the art of speaking well - with knowledge, skill and elegance" (p. 72).

Since language does not represent or map a reality "out there", its use reflects the ideas of a particular perspective. Each description is given voice from within a particular discourse and thus reflects the assumptions of that discourse. Language is therefore not neutral. A particular group of events can be languaged in multiple ways. Furthermore, the implications and effects of each description may affect those spoken about within the discourse in a myriad of ways. To speak about the rhetorical nature of language is thus to concern oneself with the powerful and yet often subtle ways in which a particular usage of language can influence its audience. The study of rhetoric is thus useful in that it highlights the operation of power in action. Becoming aware of the subjugating

effects of power provides us with the opportunity of emancipating ourselves from these effects.

4.4 The Self as Narrative

Social Constructionism challenges the idea of a stable, coherent self and replaces it with the self-as-narrative, the self as a social construction (Gergen, 1985; Hoffman, 1981; White & Epstein, 1990). Anderson and Goolishian (1992) state that we construct who we are in the domain of social conversation. This view conceives of the self as a narrative that is rendered intelligible within on-going relationships. In effect, relationships assume priority over the individual self: selves are realized as derivatives; that is, as spin-offs of various forms of relatedness (Gergen & Kaye, 1992). As a result, independent selves do not come together to form a relationship, but rather particular kinds of relatedness engender what we take to be an individual's identity.

Furthermore, the traditional modernist assumption that there is only one true self-narrative is abandoned in favour of multiple selves. As there are multiple realties so are there multiple selves or self narratives that are within the individual's repertoire of self-expressive potentialities. If selves emerge as derivatives of various forms of relatedness then, by implication, richness in relatedness contributes to rich and diverse narratives of the self. We enter relationships with the potential to use any of a wide number of narrative forms (Gergen, 1994).

The self-narrative expressed by an individual at a particular point in time has an effect on the other interlocutors and the way in which they will respond to the individual. It thus follows that not all self-narratives will be equally functional for an individual across all contexts. Herein lie the major shortcomings of the modernist conception of an intrinsic, invariant self. It can lead to rigidity in terms of interaction, limiting the behavioural and interactional alternatives available to individuals in relationship (Bruner,1990; Gergen, 1999; Gergen & Kaye, 1992.)

Consequently, the more capable we are in constructing and reconstructing our self-narrative the more capable we are in effective relationships. For example, in one context it may be useful to be able to "do" sad scenarios effectively and to formulate accounts to justify such activity. Sadness may be the most effective response in the relational dance in certain contexts. However, to be overskilled or overprepared with regard to any form of social action and/or supplementation (for example, anger, helplessness, hopelessness, sadness, failure, and so on) as virtually the only means of negotiating relationships, will not only impoverish the potential richness of these relationships but also vastly reduce the range of potentially satisfying relationships. This is especially so if one is committed to a given story of the self; that is, to adopt a story of the self as "true for me" (Gergen, 1994).

Self-understanding is hence self-narrative, and these narratives become the basis for the development of identity (Lax, 1992). This narrative, and thus our sense of identity, develops through our discourse with others. In fact, Lax (1992) goes on to say that this narrative is our discourse with others. By implication, there is no hidden self which remains to be uncovered and interpreted. But why is this re-conceptualisation of identity of any significance?

Traditional conceptions of identity have advocated the existence of a stable, enduring self, intrinsic to the individual. Identity and ideas regarding the self represent the truth and therapy is partly a process of discovering this truth, a search for "who I really am". Re-concepualising this process as the development of self-narrative/s, reveals the limitations inherent in this view. We are no longer requested or demanded to show only one "side" of ourselves since diversity is embraced. We are multiple "people" in one; we are as many "people" as we are stories about ourselves. Our style of interpersonal interaction is thus liberated from the shackles of a single immutable self so that we are free to exercise differences in terms of our relationships with others. We can be predominantly serious with person A, whilst a more spontaneous and playful interactional

stance may be encouraged in the context of our relationship with person B. "Reality as constructed in the context of relationship" is not a "catch phrase"; it is celebrated and put most cogently into practice within the sphere of social constructionism.

4.5 Knowledge

The modernist conception of knowledge is that it embodies a collection of objective facts (contained within the head of the knower) which are a reflection of an external, knowable reality. Knowledge can be acquired through the rigorous conduction of empirical, objective research.

However, from a social constructionist perspective the focus shifts one again to the context of relationship in this regard. According to Gergen (1985) "Knowledge is not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do together. Languages are essentially shared activities" (p. 270) Hoffman's (1990) stance is similar in that she states that "social construction theory posits an evolving set of meaning that emerge unendingly from the interactions between people. These meanings are not skull-bound and may not exist inside what we think of as an individual "mind". They are part of a general flow of constantly changing narratives" (p. 3).

The reader might recognise the similarities between the social constructionist perspective on meaning, understanding and knowledge. In fact, all are socially constructed in the sense that they do not take place in isolation. Knowledge and understanding are a natural outgrowth of patterns of meaning making. To bring or supplement the meaning "angry" to an interaction (such as if Helen were to glance at Jane wearing an irritated look), might translate into Jane understanding Helen as disliking her. This then has implications for the knowledge that Jane "has" or creates through her interaction with Helen about what it means to dislike someone.

However, if language, meaning, understanding and knowledge are socially constructed then it can be assumed that reality is also socially constructed. These processes form the foundations of our attempt to understand the world around us and to give meaning to our lives and thereby influence our perceptions about ourselves and the world. What does it mean to say that reality is a social construction?

4.6 Reality as a Social Construction

McNamee and Gergen (1992) assert that our ideas concerning reality are an outgrowth of social processes. Our systems of language constrain our perceptions (our ideas regarding reality), and these systems develop, in turn, within the context of shared conversation.

Related to this is the stance advocated by Gergen (1985) that language does not mirror nature, but rather creates the natures that we come to know. As a result, the meaning and understanding we develop is contingent upon our language practices, hence the fluid nature of meaning. By implication, we create our reality through the manner in which we language about it - our language and ideas regarding reality do not mirror an actual objective reality "out there". According to Anderson and Goolishian (1988), "we live and take action in a world that we define through our descriptive language in social intercourse with others. To say it somewhat differently, we live and take social action in a multiverse of worlds of description" (p. 377).

Furthermore, our accounts of the world are embedded within and are guided by cultural conventions. These conventions are historically situated and have implications for the character of the reality that they depict. Particular actions are encouraged or discouraged by the frame engendered by any particular account of reality (Gergen & Kaye, 1992).

Thus, from a social constructionist perspective there are no "real" external entities which can be accurately mapped or apprehended. Instead, the focus shifts to communicating and languaging human individuals (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). We are thereby forced to relinquish our cherished position as "knowers" and our assumption that there are "facts" which we can come to know or systems which can be "understood". We are required to abandon our idea that there are "real" patterns which we are able to discover. These, along with other ideas and assumptions, are social constructions, artefacts of socially mediated discourse.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that anything goes (Gergen, 1985). Knowledge systems are inherently dependent upon communities of shared intelligibility (and vice versa) and are thus governed to a large degree by normative rules which are historically and culturally situated. Hence, they are open to critique and transformation.

As a result, social constructionists do not claim to provide the "truth" (Shotter, 1993), nor an ontologically correct way of thinking. In fact, Hoffman (1991) challenges the assumption of a singular truth. Social constructionism invites the incorporation of multiple voices, opening up space for the celebration of those which have been marginalised. Social constructionism celebrates difference, diversity and relationship. Nonetheless, each voice or perspective may be useful, or not, depending on the context in which they are to be utilised.

With these social constructionist thoughts in mind, the following quote by Nietzche is reinvigorated with significance:

"What therefore is true? A mobile arm of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms...which long after their use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to people; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions." (in Gergen, 1994, p. 40).

4.7 The Key assumptions of Social Constructionism

With the previous discussion in mind, the assumptions underlying social constructionist thought are elucidated below. The reader should recognise many of the principles from the foregoing "conversation".

"Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266).

1. There is no direct link between the "real world" and the terms we generate to make sense of ourselves and that world. Gergen (1994; 1999) asserts that language does not map an independent world. As a result, there are numerous descriptions that could be generated for any single object or event. The focus thus shifts to the development of language in the context of social interactions, as well as the intimate relationship that exists between language and meaning.

The implication of this is that the world "out there" does not have the power to dictate the terms by which the world is to be understood. There is no "right" way in which to render a description of the world. This consequently challenges the positivist-empiricist conception of knowledge - the assumption that a systematic, objective stance can deliver an accurate view of an external reality.

Doubt is hence cast on the taken-for-granted assumptions and ideas regarding the world in which we live. Gergen (1999) claims that in numerous instances, the criteria which are invoked to identify "behaviours", "events" or "entities" have been shown to be either largely circumscribed by culture, history and social context, or can be deemed altogether nonexistent. Linguistic convention thus operates to create constraints over our understanding of the world.

2. Furthermore, the terms created do not only not map a "reality", but are themselves social artefacts. They are products of historically situated interchanges between people (Gergen, 1985). Consequently, understanding is achieved within the context of relationships between people.

It thus follows that language gains its meaning from the myriad of ways in which it is used in relationships. By implication, reality as envisioned by a particular individual is a product of the negotiation of meaning between interlocutors (Gergen, 1985).

Lending credibility to the social embeddedness of these terms is numerous ethnographic studies conducted with reference to various psychological processes. These studies have revealed that these processes differ markedly from one culture to another (Gergen, 1999). As a result, the focus shifts from an attempt to uncover "real" and universal psychological processes and resettles itself upon the manner in which particular stances are performed within the relational domain. This perspective challenges the ontology of mind in Western culture and proposes a critical examination of the social, moral, political, and economic institutions that sustain and are maintained by our assumptions regarding human inquiry.

3. It is social process which therefore operates to sustain a given form of understanding across time, rather than the empirical validity of the perspective. The salient aspect is yet again the relationship between interlocutors. The option of questioning the intelligibility of a particular perspective becomes available as a consequence. It is within this context that the rules for "what counts as what" are generated and challenged, where these ambiguous and fluid rules are applied to a critical reflection upon the perspective in question. Pure, objective observation thus falls away as a viable means of assessing the validity of perspectives, ideas and assumptions regarding the world around us.

According to Gergen (1994), the validity of the concept of truth is thereby challenged. The empiricist means of establishing truth is contested and the individualist conception of knowledge and understanding is shaken at its very foundations. "Truth" is transformed into a relational language, which is designed to have particular effects - primarily as a means of supporting one's own position, whilst simultaneously discrediting that of another. It thus serves to advance a particular set of opinions, beliefs or ideas, at the expense of competing assertions.

4. The forms of negotiated understanding take centre stage within the social constructionist paradigm. The descriptions and explanations, which are bred or co-constructed between people are forms of social action and they themselves form integral parts of particular social patterns (Gergen, 1994). As a result, they operate in such a way as to sustain and support certain patterns, whilst discrediting others. Furthermore, the way in which ideas about a person are co-constructed (thus rendering a description) has implications for the types of action invited in response. Language, understanding and social action are therefore intricately related within a complex web of interactions.

Thus, "the explanatory locus of human action shifts from the interior region of the mind to the processes and structure of human interaction. The question "why" is answered not with a psychological state or process but with consideration of persons in relationship." (Gergen, 1985, p. 271).

5. The manner in which we describe, explain or represent our world has an effect on the shape of our future (Gergen, 1999). The relationships in which we are engaged constrain and enhance our language practices. Moreover, these relationship processes are constrained by the broader dynamics (rituals and traditions) inherent in a particular society. Since language and relationship share an intimate space, the languages of description generated in the context of relationship have implications for the types of relationships that are fostered or constrained within these contexts. The modes or types of relationships engaged

in, as well as the meanings (descriptions) which are ascribed within these transactions, serve to sustain these traditions. They hence have a moulding influence of our future.

6. Another implication of the future-shaping effect of current modes of relationship is that our future well-being is influenced by our reflecting on our forms of understanding (Gergen, 1999). The adoption of a self-reflexive stance regarding our everyday understandings, as well as our traditions and rituals, enables us to make decisions regarding those practices that are no longer useful, and those which are worth sustaining. Those deemed problematic or obsolete could be dissolved by the decision no longer to language about them in the same ways. We are also able, then, to create others, through the development of new language practices.

5. Discourse and Power

The role of discourse acquires a significant voice from a social constructionist stance. Meaning is co-created between people, but this occurs at both a micro-level and a macro-level, between people in relationship as well as at a societal level. The powerful influence exercised by the prevalent discourses in society cannot be ignored, since it is these very discourses which people often play out within the context of their everyday lives. The discourse of delinquency, as shall be discussed in Chapter 4, has implications for how we think about those youngsters who do not follow the rules advocated by society, the ideas that we have about what causes the development of the problem, and what we believe needs to be done to ameliorate the situation. It is for this reason that the role of discourse has been delegated a separate and significant position within the context of this chapter.

5.1 What is discourse?

Faircough (1995) has defined discourse as the use of language as a form of social practice. According to van Dijk (1997) discourse is also a form of language use, however, he continues to say that a discussion of discourse should also include who uses language, how, why and when they use it. Parker (1990) asserts that discourse is a "system of statements which construct an object" (p. 191). It can thus be seen that language and discourse are intertwined. It is also apparent that discourse and language are not the same - discourse is a form of language, it is a particular use of language, designed to achieve particular effects. It can construct an object, but it can also construct an object in a particular way such as to invite particular objects, whilst condemning or silently rejecting others. It is not surprising then, that discourse has been linked to the concept of power (Gergen, 1999; Parker, 1989; Sarup, 1993). The relationship between discourse, knowledge, and power will be the focal point of this section. However, firstly, the idea of a discourse will be fleshed out more thoroughly.

Gergen (1999) explores the process of linguistic construction and asserts that it is useful to employ three different lenses in this regard. In effect, he is pointing here to the usefulness of focusing on the differing effects and levels of a discourse. Broadly speaking, he separates discourse into three broad areas: discourse as structure, discourse as persuasion, and discourse in use. These will be briefly elucidated.

5.2 Discourse as Structure

The structural effect of discourse acts as a background constraint. The focus here is on the rigidity engendered by our discourses, the ways in which our discourses can force us into inescapable boxes, particular ways of behaving and perceiving the world around us. The use of metaphor in everyday life illuminates this process. The manner in which we speak implies particular modes of action,

it suggests what is expected to follow and what the outcomes may or may not be. An example of the operation of metaphoric language in everyday life is the manner in which arguments are often languaged. Such interactions are often equated metaphorically with war- "You have shot down everything that I have said". Through this way of speaking, we enter the interaction as combatants. We may either win or lose, kill or be destroyed. Once we construct the argument using the metaphor of war, our roles are clear. Should we wish this to be otherwise, so that other outcomes may be possible, we might find it useful to develop alternative metaphors for the argument, for example, using the metaphor of a dance.

Perhaps more closely related to the field of psychology, is the whole "arsenal" of the metaphors of mind. These metaphors, yet again, have implications for the practice of psychotherapy and the construction of theory, as well as for the manner in which we interact with other persons. For example, "mind as a form of container" has different implications from "mind as social". The manner in which emotions are traditionally conceptualised is intricately tied to the idea of mind as container - they are contained within the mind and belong to us. We may thus be conceptualised as having particular traits that are composites of a unique personality "structure". Mind as social transports emotionality from within the mind, to the social space between people, emotions are thereby conceptualised as characteristics of particular relationships, rather than retaining ownership by an individual.

Another structural aspect of discourse is that which is related to the construction of a narrative reality. Although "discourse" and "narrative" are essentially interchangeable terms, the contexts in which they are used differ. The term "discourse" is largely used to refer to a "grand narrative", that which has political and economic effects. Conversely, "narrative" is retained for more local contexts - the conversational realm where reality is co-constructed between people.

Narrative "reality" has implications for how we define our world and ourselves. The more fluid aspects of narrative construction will be discussed shortly; however, Gergen (1999) also discusses the structural effects of this narrative construction, that which is more closely related to the operation of discourse in our society. He states that there are particular standards that one is required to follow for the process of narrative construction within Western traditions. Essentially, a narrative is required to move toward a valued endpoint - the story must have a point. Events discussed within the narrative must be more or less relevant to this endpoint. These events are traditionally ordered according to the concept of linear time and causal linkages are advocated so that the narrative provides a sense of explanation. These standards thus operate to shape what is, and what is not, considered a relevant part of the story. There are always aspects which must be excluded, rendered superfluous. These standards hence operate in such a way as to structure the ways in which we think and story about ourselves and the world around us. These stories have implications for the ways in which we live and order our lives - the power of narrative construction should not be underestimated, especially from a social constructionist stance.

5.3 Discourse as Persuasion

An appreciation of the persuasive or rhetorical effects of discourse is basically synonymous with the study of power in action. The powerful effect that discourse has on shaping our ideas regarding ourselves and the world around us has already been alluded to above. However, here the focus rests on the powerful effect that language and discourse has on our lives (Parker, 1989). The language of "objective reality" is in itself a rhetorical achievement. It serves to generate hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion. Challenging the discourse of "objectivity", the rhetoric of "reality", allows one to highlight the rhetorical manoeuvres, thereby contesting accepted conventions and opening the space for other discourses to speak. This does not mean that rhetoric can or should be abandoned, since it plays an important role in ordering our lives. It is through

constructing particular realties that we can come to agree on ways of living together. However, problems primarily result when these realties are treated as universal or "really real".

5.4 Discourse in Use

People in the context of their everyday interactions use discourse; it thus manifests a pragmatic dimension. As has already been discussed, the self and our ideas regarding "reality" are co-constructed within the conversational context. Discourse thus has a substantial effect at the local level, and, it has been argued that it is from this level that our "grand discourses" emanate. The focus here moves toward the fluidity of discourse, the ways in which precisely who one is depends on the moment-to-moment movements in conversation. Identity development is hence precariously situated and is vulnerable to the effects of the subtle shifts is word usage, intonation and gesture.

Our shared understandings of what is real and what constitutes proper conduct (the "real" and the "good") provides the foundation out of which our interactions with each other emerge. As we develop the requirements for what should be done, so we establish what should not be done. In other words, as we co-ordinate the ways in which we are required to talk and behave in particular contexts, so we create ideas regarding what would be considered a violation or a failure. We establish particular patterns of interacting with each other and the very construction of this pattern creates the context for its violation. Any disruption to this established pattern could be perceived as a threat to the accepted reality. According to Gergen (1999), "evil" lurks in the very disruption to these established patterns.

Complexity is created when one considers the multifaceted nature of reality. We each participate in numerous relationships - with friends, spouses, work colleagues, siblings, neighbours, and so on. As we do so, a multiplicity of local

realities emerge, which fosters myriad ways of talking and being. It is here that the potential for disruption is created. As we move from one relationship to another, we transport with us the residues of the previous interaction, these possibly having a disruptive influence on the present local ontology.

The development of our identity is cradled within these multiple relationships. Who one is, and the way in which one is defined, is negotiated within the context of these relationships. Hence, a multi-faceted self is generated, as we change the manner in which we interact in accordance with the characteristics of the local ontology created. From the moment of birth when one is given a name and a gender, the existence of the self as an individual person begins to figure in a communal ontology (Gergen, 1999). As the words "myself", "my thoughts", "feelings" and "beliefs" are articulated, so a particular kind of self, one who is conceptualised as a single agent, is constructed. The way in which we interact with each other, carrying these assumptions through each moment of interaction, so this creation of reality is solidified. Words and actions generated between people variously construct the other as good or evil, carrying with them a moral force. I float upon a sea of discourse and it is only when I am aware that there are other ways of being, am I free to change the direction of my ship.

5.5 Discourse, Knowledge and Power

Foucault explored the power relationships that are involved in the reality construction process (Foucault, 1996). He saw that every human culture generates methods for regulating the behaviour of its members and utilised the concept of power to elucidate this process.

Essentially, Foucault argued that predominantly we experience the positive or constitutive effects of power (White & Epston, 1990). In other words, it has an effect on our lives which can lead to the development of new capabilities and modes of activity rather than leading to the limitation of pre-existing ones (Sarup,

1993). However, the "normalising truths" (global or unitary knowledges) that we internalise have the effect of subjecting us to their power to shape our lives and our relationships. These "truths" are ideas that have been accorded a truth status and they are "normalising" in the sense that they operate to construct the norms around which people are encouraged to shape or constitute their lives. They are the moral values, or the "good", which permeate our discourses.

This form of power subjugates the individual. Foucault refers to these individuals as "docile bodies" and adds that they are conscripted into particular activities which support the global or unitary knowledges in our society. These knowledges (or discourses) are those which make unitary and global truth claims, asserting to propagate "objective reality". They hence serve to exclude those voices which are considered inadequate, unscientific or naïve. The effect is that particular knowledges are also subjugated.

Thus, according to Foucault, there is a close connection between knowledge and power (Gergen, 1994). He argues that knowledge is power over others, it is the power to define others (Sarup, 1993). It is power that creates new objects of knowledge. Simultaneously, knowledge has the effect of power - its very construction has effects on the lives of others. Knowledge and power are hence inseparable.

"There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth." (Foucault, in White & Epston, 1990, p. 22)

In fact, Foucault has referred to this type of power as disciplinary power. He uses the description of the Panopticon to illustrate the mechanisms of this power (Parker, 1989). This is a system of surveillance (for example, the dominant discourse) that is internalised to the point that each person becomes his or her

own overseer. As a result, these techniques of power are present at the local level in the form of social control, "of subjugation", techniques for the "objectification" of persons, as well as for the "objectification" of the bodies of persons. It is the availability of these techniques, according to Foucault, that was necessary for the successful growth of the unitary and global knowledges from the 17th century onwards. They were also seminal in the growth of capitalism.

This technology has participated in recruiting the individual into his or her own subjugation. To participate within the norms generated by a particular discourse or unitary and global knowledge, is to accept that discourse and be subjugated by its effects. For example, to brush one's teeth is to live within and accept the dentistry discourse, as well as, perhaps, the health and hygiene discourse. We learn to evaluate ourselves in accordance with the standards propagated by a particular discourse and we train ourselves accordingly. We thus participate in our own subjugation.

Since power is defined differently by different theorists, the term as used by Foucault, and adopted for use within this dissertation, requires further explanation. He argues that power is not a possession nor a capacity, but is rather a network; its threads extend everywhere (Foucault, 1996; Sarup, 1993). Power thus has no exact location; it does not reside within a structure or a person, but is a characteristic of a set of relationships (Gergen, 1999). The focus thus shifts from those who are wielding power, to the relationship and those who are caught up within the power relations.

By implication, power is local. It is constituted by normal people within the context of their everyday interaction. According to Foucault, power is productive. It invites us to participate within particular relationships with existing power relations. Power is therefore not fixed, but is a fluid process. Through its operation various groups or voices become marginalised, suppressed or exploited. There is a continuous process of ever shifting power differentials. Nevertheless, this does not insinuate that all persons are equal in the exercise of

this power. It also does not mean that there are not individuals who do not suffer the subjugating effects of a particular discourse more than others (White & Epston, 1990). Thus, the value of challenging these unitary and global knowledges.

Gergen (1999) asserts that the process of reflecting on discursive convention (the operation and effects of the grand narratives) can be liberating. It has already been acknowledged that particular types of oppression and injustices can be sustained by our languages and discourse. This type of critique can hence open up possibilities for reconstruction. It allows us to invite other voices into the conversation that may have the effect of encouraging a sense of community among different perspectives. Different voices or perspectives can be useful in varying contexts - none must be intrinsically true (nor can they be validated as such) to be of such value.

Furthermore, such a critique can show how unquestioned definitions might have changed over time, as well as the types of social processes or action that have been encouraged by these definitions. Conversely, those processes or actions discouraged can also be an area of exploration. How have these definitions served to construct who we are? What have been the effects of these constructions on our ideas and our lives? How have the discourses we have invested so much power in helped to constitute our lives?

An awareness of the effects of power can allow us to make different choices, to develop new knowledges or discourses, with differing effects. In line with this, Foucault calls for an insurrection of subjugated knowledges (White & Epston, 1990) against institutions supported by particular global and unitary knowledges, as well as against the effects of the knowledge and power invested in scientific discourse. The aim is thus not to "get outside" of the effects of power and discourse, this is impossible. Foucault was of the opinion that power is omnipresent, that we are unable to crawl outside of its effects (Gordon, 1980). Rather, it is to acknowledge the multifaceted and multiply constructed realities

which colour our lives. It is a celebration of this richness. It is an attempt to create more choices within the context of our lived experience.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has concerned itself with an elucidation of epistemology. The social constructionist approach or perspective has been the focal point of the chapter, since this forms the epistemological backbone of the dissertation. However, a brief presentation of the modernist and cybernetic epistemologies have also been included, since they will be of use to the reader in terms of identifying the epistemological assumptions underpinning the various approaches to adolescent delinquency.

The following chapter thus comprises a collection of modernist and systemic approaches to delinquency. It is a literature review intended to provide the reader with an overview of the theories guiding those dealing with delinquency in the 21st century - teachers, parents, law-makers, psychologists, social workers, as well as the adolescents themselves. The elucidation of the assumptions underpinning modernist and systemic or cybernetic epistemology is intended to prepare the reader for a consideration of the epistemologies informing the theories presented. Chapter 4 is devoted to considering delinquency as a social construction. The discussion presented in this chapter sets the stage for such a consideration. Hence, it is armed with an explicit consideration of the powerful shaping effects of epistemology that the reader is encouraged to traverse the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Reflections on Delinquency in Adolescence: Diverse Discourses

1. Introduction

The field of adolescent or juvenile delinquency is littered with theories purporting to explain both causation and advocate effective treatment regimes. It is an area that has captured the interest of various disciplines (discourses), from criminology through sociology to psychology. The voices from within these disciplines have not been univocal, adding to the richness that one finds in any textbook focusing on this subject.

Accordingly, a thorough discussion of all theories or narratives related to this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, this chapter will focus on a few selected perspectives. It is designed to provide a glimpse of that which has been written on the subject. It serves to contextualise the focus of the present dissertation.

Moreover, previous as well as current narratives regarding delinquent behaviour are also an important consideration in the attempt to render an intelligible social constructionist stance. It is through the growing awareness of the social embeddedness of theory that one comes to appreciate its socially constructed nature. Although this point will become clearer during the following chapter, it might be useful at this juncture for the reader to consider in what way the following are themselves socially constructed narratives.

Consequently, the epistemological frameworks outlined in the previous chapter will aid the reader in the contextualisation of the current theories. For the sake of

clarity, they are separated into three distinct sections, in accordance with their epistemological foundations: linear/modernist discourse, first order cybernetic discourse and then concluding with second order cybernetic discourse.

2. Early Approaches to Adolescent Delinquency

The present dissertation focuses initially on modernist approaches to delinquency, leading towards a postmodern approach, specifically a social constructionist stance. A discussion of earlier approaches would lead us beyond the scope of the dissertation. Essentially, the earlier Classical and Neo-classical approaches were concerned primarily with the judicial aspects of crime (and hence the act as opposed to the individual) and they were propelled by the theory of rationalism (Stumpf, 1982). Hence, theories were devised to account for why people make the decisions they do, as well as the ways in which they can be deterred from making decisions inconsistent with the ideals of society. These ideas were based very much in the philosophical ideals that prevailed at that time (see Kant, in Stumpf, 1982). Translated into the realm of the criminal justice system, potential criminals were deterred through the threat of punishment.

As social thinking changed, propelled by the failure of the judicial system to deal adequately with crime, the focus shifted to a consideration of the perpetrator of crime, as opposed to an almost exclusive emphasis on the criminal act itself. The early biological approaches ushered in a new perspective, which virtually snatched away the individual's free-will (a strong theme in classical and neo-classical thought), reconceptualising persons essentially as slaves to the tyranny of an ancestral gene pool; assuming that biology or genetic make-up dictates what we can and cannot do. Initial attempts at elucidating a genetic cause were crude, preoccupied with the physical characteristics of an individual and an attempt to map particular characteristics to a predisposition for developing criminal tendencies. It was assumed that people are born criminals, destined to

live a life characterised by low moral values and crime. Gradually the medical model began to loosen its rigid ideas regarding human functioning to include social and psychological factors, as it evolved into its present form.

3. Linear / Modernist Discourse

3.1 Introduction

The following theories emanate from within the modernist tradition. Consequently, they reflect the modernist epistemology, and the reader might recognise the assumptions which inform these theories from the discussion in the previous chapter. Essentially, any textbook regarding delinquency is designed to provide an overview of the numerous approaches, attempting to capture the theories as "accurately" as possible. These theories, in turn, endeavour to reflect the "reality of delinquency", illuminating for the reader what "delinquency" is all about, what causes "delinquency", and how we can attempt to eradicate this "problem" from our society. "Truth" is captured in the text since language is entrusted with the capacity to capture meaning and reflect or mirror an objective reality independent of the human mind. Meaning is contained within the words that we use and any reference to the dictionary will be sufficient to render a word meaningful. With these thoughts in mind, consider below how these modernist theories have carved out the contours of their own perspectives on "delinquency".

3.2 Adolescent Delinquency as Science: Modern Biological Discourse

3.2.1 Introduction

The medical or biological school belongs to the positivist (or linear) paradigm. As such, the fundamental driving force underlying this discourse is the belief that any inquiry into human behaviour must be performed within the stringent

framework of the scientific method (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Aetiology and treatment, as well as a careful consideration of the validity and reliability of research designs, represent the important areas of concern.

Within the biological or medical model, the fundamental assertion is that the source of deviancy is contained within the mental or physical make-up of the individual. That is, antisocial or aggressive traits are the direct manifestation of a defective biological make-up. By implication, it is the physical constitution of the individual that is to be examined in the endeavour to locate the cause of misbehaviour, within the framework advocated by the scientific community (isolate the cause through objective observation).

Nonetheless, during the 20th century, the biological approach took a drastic turn from its "biologically predetermined" roots, at the same time as modern medical procedures paved the way for more sophisticated medical research. Theories and explanations of the medical basis of delinquency increased in complexity and explanatory value as a result. Further, researchers and experts in the field of adolescent delinquency no longer seriously entertain the view that an adolescent's behaviour can be solely controlled by physical conditions present at birth. Influenced by the failure of the medical model to develop an "airtight" theory of delinquency, increasingly the medical model has included social and psychological variables into its range of study. As a result, researchers are currently exploring the interaction between nature and nurture (Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992). Nevertheless, the focus is still primarily attuned to medical or biological factors.

With the rise of the medical model, the focus began to shift from a preoccupation with retribution to a concern with rehabilitation. Treatment plans were developed in accordance with the presumed needs of offenders. The predominant assumptions regarding the nature of the offender were completely altered. He or she was no longer considered greedy or inherently lacking in moral character, but was rather defined as "sick" and thus in need of rehabilitation, not punishment. The following represents a few areas of study in this regard.

3.2.2 Biochemical Explanations

Gaining popularity in recent years is the suggestion that chemical deficiencies and other abnormalities in the body can affect the entire nervous system. This, in turn, can influence the ability of an adolescent to perform in a socially acceptable manner (Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1996). Brain patterns may also be negatively influenced by brain damage, caused by either disease or injury. This then, may translate into maladaptive patterns of behaviour. Moreover, certain chemical additives, vitamin deficiencies or certain foodstuffs have also been correlated with aggressive behaviour. These explanations, however, lack definitive conclusive evidence if considered from within the medical discourse.

3.2.3. Neurological Dysfunction

Neurological functions are generally ascertained with an electroencephalogram (EEG) or a CAT scan. Research has indicated that children who have abnormal EEGs at birth may go on to suffer developmental problems later in life. Brain damage, leading to neurological impairment, has been implicated in behavioural problems. For example, a recent analysis of death row inmates has revealed that a significant number had sustained head injuries as children, which had resulted in neurological impairment (Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1996). These studies suggest that such neurological impairment may be a contributing factor in the failure to regulate behaviour in a socially acceptable way. Moreover, it has been suggested that impaired brain activity may be responsible for the outbursts of anger, hostility and aggression displayed by antisocial youths (Bartollas, 1997).

It is not surprising then that minimal brain dysfunction (MBD), hyperactivity and other learning difficulties have also been implicated as biological explanations of delinquent activity (Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1996; Siegel & Senna, 1988).

Hyperactivity, or hyperkinesis has been observed in many youngsters in the schooling system. These youngsters are difficult to discipline and have become a focus of attention due to their disruptive and impulsive behaviour. Learning difficulties have been identified as a possible source of behaviour problems. The process might be initiated through the teacher perceiving the child to be behaving badly (child expressing frustration with not being able to do the work) and thus representing a discipline problem. The teacher has thus failed to recognise the actual problem and thereby the situation is exacerbated. Truancy and other behavioural problems may eventually ensure that the child is labelled a delinquent. Delinquency was thus not the original problem, but is an outgrowth of the child's inability to cope sufficiently (as well as being an outgrowth of the attempted solution).

3.2.4. Genetic Influences

It has been hypothesized that some individuals inherit a genetic configuration that predisposes them to behave in a violent or aggressive manner (Shoemaker, 1996; Siegel & Senna, 1988). Studies in this area have focused on either twin or adoption studies. Some evidence does appear to support a genetic link between delinquency and genetic make-up, but there is little conclusive evidence to date. The genetic foundations of delinquency are still heavily debated. Complicating this area of study is separating environmental and genetic influences, as well as finding suitable candidates as research subjects.

3.2.5 Conclusion

It seems that the biological school has failed to locate the concrete empirical evidence it so badly needed to support its contention that biological or genetic factors are the precipitating agent in the equation that has been formulated to explain human behaviour, development and interaction. Of course, there is evidence when considered from within the medical discourse to support a

correlation, and this is not surprising since we are, in effect, biologically influenced to some degree. Nevertheless, it would be naive to refute psychological and sociological theories since our behaviour is embedded within a network of social processes, an idea expanded upon as the discussion matures.

So, what are the basic assumptions underlying the medical model? The problem is located at the level of genes / a biological deficit. This deficit has a direct influence on the behaviour of the person. Some proponents of this approach admit that psychological and environmental factors may intervene to influence the presentation of the problem. Nevertheless, the problem itself (for example, delinquent behaviour) is located within or inside the individual. The individual is hence conceptualised as sick, and in need of cure.

3.3 The Traditional Psychological Discourse of Adolescent Delinquency

The early 20th century marked the budding and development of some of the major theories in psychology today. It was the heyday of the linear or positivist approaches to human functioning. The following discussion does not represent all these major approaches, but is rather intended to provide the reader with an outline of the theories of delinquency that have emanated from within this discourse.

3.3.1 The Psychoanalytic Perspective

Within Freud's theory of personality development, the child passes through critical periods of personality formation. It is during these psychosexual stages of development that the child must master certain bodily functions and drives, and a failure to pass successfully through a stage in the developmental process can lead to problems later in life. Essentially, human behaviour is contingent upon

the interaction of complex inner drives (the id, ego and superego) (Cloete & Stevens, 1990).

Parents are identified as crucial to the child's successful navigation of these stages. As a result, personality and conduct disorders, as well as neuroses, are the result of bad parenting (Goldstein, 1990). Psychoanalysts assert that problems may develop for the following reasons; the absence of the mother, the mother's rejection of the child during infancy and very early childhood, lack of affection and discipline by both parents during the first five years of the child's life, and, specifically for boys, the absence or ineffectual influence of a father figure. Unresolved or ungratified needs are hence repressed early in the child's development, at a time before the child's ego is able to master painful problems. This repressed material continues to stew in the cess-pool of unconscious forces, manufacturing distress within the realm of the in the unconscious mind and endeavouring to thrust its way to the "surface", to the realm of the conscious mind (Thomas, 1992). The ego reacts to this "intrusion" and resists its direct manifestation in the conscious mind. The result is a compromise, the symptom (for example, the behavioural manifestation of delinquency) is a representation of the initial repressed material, it is a substitute for what did not happen at an earlier point in development (Freud, 1991).

Moreover, the role of the superego does not go unblamed as a possible causative factor within psychoanalytic thinking. The child's parents are assumed to play a crucial role in terms of the development of the child's superego (Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1996). During the early years of a child's development, the rules of what is or is not allowed are enforced by the environment (Thomas, 1992). The child is conceptualised as born amoral and hence he or she relies on his or her parents to develop a system of reward and punishment. These rules will eventually become internalised in the form of a superego. It is hypothesized that a weak or badly developed superego leads to the expression of delinquent acts. It has also been argued that the criminal does not possess an independent conscience (superego) and the instinctive impulses of the id are free to dominate

the person's actions. The ego in this instance is too weak to negotiate a balance between the id and superego (West, 1967). Consequently, the individual acts out aggressive and sexual impulses.

The psychoanalytic paradigm has been modified somewhat since its development by Freud. Different branches have been initiated, such as the object relations approach. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the various spin-offs differ somewhat from that presented above. Nonetheless, the core assumptions remain largely the same.

Therefore, what are the basic assumptions informing the psychoanalytic approach? The problem (that is, delinquent behaviour) is the result of a failure to successfully negotiate earlier stages of development. There is a direct causal link between these two factors. The problem is hence inside the individual and parents have only played a role insofar as they have failed to aid the child to negotiate these early stages adequately. Therapy can assist in locating the source of the problem / repression. This will deal with the problem presenting as delinquency. This approach also reflects the assumption that the individual has an internal mind that is divided into different components, with varying levels of consciousness.

3.3.2. The Behavioural Perspective

Behaviourists do not agree that an individual's behaviour is controlled by unconscious mental process. Rather, these theorists argue that an individual's personality is shaped or learned throughout life in the context of continued interaction with others (Siegel & Senna, 1996). Bad behaviour, and by implication delinquency, is thus learned, and accordingly, can be unlearned. Problematic behaviour has been reinforced throughout the life of the child, and so, changing reinforcement contingencies will have the effect of changing the child's behaviour. The emphasis is on external, observable aspects of the child's

behaviour. These external factors, which impinge on the child, are manipulated in an effort to change the problematic behaviour.

The inference can thus be advanced that the child develops moral behaviour through repeated punishment for "bad" conduct, and reward contingencies for desired conduct (Fox, 1976). The environment can be manipulated as a tool to change or control the behaviour of an individual.

The focal point shifts from intrapsychic forces, to the interaction between the individual and the environment. The individual loses his or her position as slave to his or her intrapsychic energies. Reinforcement contingencies within the supporting environment emerge as the new master of the individual's fate. Of course, this is behaviourism in its purest form, that which is directly influenced by Watson and Skinner.

What assumptions are fundamental to the behavioural approach? The problem (delinquent behaviour) is behaviour that has been learned by the individual. The individual is the focal point, other factors are important insofar as they have a reinforcing effect on the problematic behaviour. Only those factors that can be observed are taken into account. Human behaviour is therefore the focal point of the theory, while mental constructs are not. Therapy is a process of providing different learning contingencies for the individual. There is no reference to any deep – seated problem early in childhood; the focus is on factors maintaining the problem in the present environmental circumstances. There is no interest whatsoever in an individual mind, but it is implied through the concept of learning.

3.3.3. The Social Learning Approach

Theorists such as Albert Bandura, Walter Mischel and Richard Walters expanded on the teachings of Skinner and Watson (Siegel & Senna, 1988). Social Learning theorists do not apply behaviourist ideas as strictly as was advocated

by their predecessors. Rather, it is assumed that it is the individual's learning and social experiences, combined with his or her values and expectations, which determine behaviour. Social learning theorists generally assert that children will model their behaviour according to the following:

1. The reactions that they receive from others in response to the behaviour. If the behaviour is rewarded or reinforced, it is likely to be repeated.
2. The behaviours they see influential people around them engage in. They will strive to be like those they admire.
3. The behaviour they view on television and in the movies they watch. Children may model the behaviour of "idols" they have identified. Furthermore, the media provide a reference signifying "normal" or desirable behaviour.

In effect, should the child be rewarded for a particular behaviour, or should the child witness another being rewarded for a specific behaviour, it is likely that the child will also engage in that behaviour. Thus, if aggression is rewarded, the child will master aggressive behavioural stances. Being raised in a violent home may teach the child that violence is an acceptable and rewarding way of life.

As can be surmised from the above, Bandura's approach to treating deviance does not rest upon the assumption that therapy is based on curing a mental disorder, or alleviating the underlying cause of such mental disorder or disease (Thomas, 1992). The "delinquent" is not treated as "sick" but as someone in need of behaviour modification. The delinquent act is simply the result of the way the individual learned to cope with both the environment and with self-imposed demands.

It thus follows that the act can be changed through modifying the environment, so that the individual is no longer reinforced for engaging in the undesirable behaviour. Furthermore, a consideration of cognitive processes is also important. Perceptions, thoughts, competencies and values are taken into account since the way in which a person thinks plays an important mediating role

in terms of observable behaviour (Bartol & Bartol, 1989). Self -reinforcement is hence as important as environmental reinforcement. The individual is once again released from their position as slave to environmental processes. This thus constitutes the beginnings of a contextual approach, one that considers the reciprocal interaction between behaviour and the controlling conditions (Fox, 1976).

What essential propositions underpin the social learning approach? Once again, the child is the focus of attention. This includes cognitive factors, as well as environmental factors sustaining the problematic behaviour. The assumption is thus the existence of an individual mind. Furthermore, there is a search for direct causal links – in the environment as well as within the individual's cognitive processes. The cause, as in the behaviourist tradition, is the satisfying consequence that the deviant behaviour continues to bring the adolescent.

3.3.4. Personality-Trait Explanations

Within this tradition, attempts are made to understand the configuration of core personality characteristics of deviant individuals (Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1996). The assumption is that delinquents are different from "normal" individuals, although they are not considered to be mentally ill. It is the personality disturbance that interferes with functioning in familial, school and community contexts.

Typically, proponents of this approach presume that the delinquent acts are a symptom of underlying conflicts within the psychological framework (Shoemaker, 1996). The particular personality structure concerned is formed within the individual's childhood, although life circumstances may play a small role in modifying this structure. The individual thus presents with an aberrant 'arrangement' of traits. These abnormal or aberrant personality traits act in such

a way as to produce "delinquency". A person is hence delinquent because that is who s/he is, in terms of his or her core personality characteristics.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV classifies antisocial behaviour as a personality disorder (Antisocial Personality Disorder). Conduct Disorder, which focuses on the behaviour of the child, is largely seen as the precursor for the development of an Antisocial Personality Disorder. This particular "aberrant personality structure" has been identified as most relevant to the study of delinquency (Siegel & Senna, 1988). Those who come into frequent contact with the law are generally identified as manifesting all or some of the criteria for "conduct disorder" or "antisocial personality disorder". Thus the diagnostic criteria required for both the diagnosis of conduct disorder and antisocial personality disorder, are as follows (Barlow & Durand, 1995):

Antisocial Personality Disorder

A. There is a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others, occurring since age 15 years, as indicated by three (or more) of the following:
    1. Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviours as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest.
    2. Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure.
    3. Impulsivity or failure to plan ahead.
    4. Irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults.
    5. Reckless disregard for safety of self or others.
    6. Consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behaviour or honour financial obligations.
    7. Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalising having hurt, mistreated or stolen from another.

B. The individual is at least 18 years.
C. There is evidence of Conduct Disorder with onset before 15 years.
D. The occurrence of antisocial behaviour is not exclusively during the course of Schizophrenia or a Manic Episode.

Conduct Disorder

A. A repetitive and persistent pattern of behaviour in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated, as manifested by the presence of three (or more) of the following criteria in the past 12 months, with at least one criterion present in the past six months:

Aggression to people and animals

1. Often bullies, threatens, or intimidates others.
2. Often initiates physical fights.
3. Has used a weapon that can cause serious physical harm to others.
4. Has been physically cruel to people.
5. Has been physically cruel to animals.
6. Has stolen while confronting a victim.
7. Has forced someone into sexual activity.

Destruction of property

8. Has deliberately engaged in fire setting with the intention of causing serious damage.
9. Has deliberately destroyed others' property (other than by fire setting).

Deceitfulness or theft

10. Has broken into someone else's house, building or car.
11. Often lies to obtain goods or favours or avoid obligations.
12. Has stolen items of nontrivial value without confronting a victim

Serious violations of rules

13. Often stays out at night despite parental prohibitions, beginning before age 13 years.
14. Has run away from home overnight at least twice while living in parental or parental surrogate home (or once without returning for a lengthy period).
15. Is often truant from school, beginning before age 13 years.

B. The disturbance in behaviour causes clinically significant impairment in social, academic, or occupational functioning.

C. If the individual is age 18 years or older, criteria are not met for antisocial personality disorder.

Specify type based on age at onset:

Childhood-Onset Type: onset of at least one criterion characteristic of conduct disorder prior to age 10 years.

Adolescent-Onset Type: absence of any criterion characteristics of conduct disorder prior to age 10 years.

Specify severity:
Mild: few if any conduct problems in excess of those required to make the diagnosis and conduct problems cause only minor harm to others.
Moderate: number of conduct problems and effect on others intermediate between "mild" and "severe".
Severe: many conduct problems in excess of those required to make the diagnosis or conduct problems cause considerable harm to others.

Essentially, this perspective does not represent a coherent approach to delinquency, other than an agreement that the problem is located within an individual's personality dynamics. As a result, there is disagreement regarding how those diagnosed, as "conduct disordered" or "antisocial" should be treated. Further, the DSM-IV criteria do not provide any information about the "problem" other than state the behavioural characteristics one should look for diagnostically. Consequently, the treatment approach eventually adopted depends largely on the epistemology or theoretical perspective of the treating professional.

The central assumptions are as follows. There exists a stable, internal personality structure. Observable behaviour is a direct manifestation of this personality structure. This implies that it is the personality structure that causes particular behavioural patterns to emerge. The problem is therefore inside the individual.

3.4. The Sociological and Social Psychological Discourses of Adolescent Delinquency

Numerous sociological and social psychological accounts have been rendered regarding delinquency causation. The multiple theories that have been generated from within these discourses have ranged from those focusing on social structure to those which focus on social processes as causative factors. Within this context, perspectives have also varied in terms of the assumed locus of the problem. Particular narratives have regarded society at fault, whereas others have contested this view, advocating the individual as the source of the problem. Still, others have considered a combination of these factors. The following section presents a small collection of these narratives.

3.4.1. Anomie and Social Structure

Proponents from both of these approaches agree that although personal and situational factors may impinge on delinquency, it is primarily caused by environmental factors (Shoemaker, 1996). The environmental factors concerned are the disorganised structures and institutions of society.

This disorganisation creates confusion and uncertainty, leaving the individual vulnerable to delinquent behaviour. Social factors are thus endowed with much power by these models in that it is these factors that control delinquency. Instability within these structures implies instability in terms of the adolescent's functioning; they are less able to resist the temptation to commit deviant acts. Both theories assert that criminality is inversely related to social class due to the greater instability created within the lower class context. However, they part ways when the component considered to be in disarray is discussed.

Social Structure

Within this framework, the disorganisation of institutional and / or community based controls (Bartollas, 1997) is responsible for the development of problematic behaviour. Siegel and Senna (1988) assert that Shaw and McKay, two prominent researchers in this regard, view delinquency as a manifestation of a decaying transitional neighbourhood. As families and neighbourhoods break down, adolescents become vulnerable to committing delinquent acts (Bartollas, 1997). Gangs form as a means of survival, whether this is for economic gain, defence, or friendship. In the main, these gangs advocate cultural norms and values that conflict with those of society.

Anomie

In contrast to the social structural position, the anomie perspective advanced by Merton locates the problem within the inconsistencies that exist between societal conditions and the individual's opportunity for growth, fulfilment and a sense of productivity within that society (Shoemaker, 1996). Certain individuals are sensitive to the disadvantages prevalent within society as well as to the inherent paradox within which they are placed. The individual is encouraged to engage in legitimate activities for the purpose of economic gain, so as to have access to the culturally defined goals of obtaining wealth, success and power. However, not all members of society are in an equal position in terms of opportunities available to attain these goals. Those who have little or no formal education, coupled with minimal economic resources, find that they are thereby denied the opportunity of acquiring these desired assets legally. Consequently, they are motivated to engage in illegal and illegitimate delinquent activities as a means to obtain the same ends.

Within this context, there are those individuals who may also reject social goals and who develop their own social and ethical standards. The approach is thus felicitously labelled "anomie" as it signifies deviant individual's lack of "normal"

social and ethical standards. Consequently, it is these individuals who are labelled as being opposed to mainstream society. Nonetheless, the behaviour of "delinquents" can be conceptualised as a consequence of the frustration that is generated by the strain of these anomic conditions (Fox, 1976).

3.4.2. Labelling Theory

Frederick Thrasher was one of the earliest researchers to indicate the negative consequences of being labelled a delinquent (Shoemaker, 1996). This was followed by Frank Tannenbaum's assertions that delinquent acts were often the result of what he referred to as the "dramatization of evil". Essentially, Tannenbaum insisted that officially labelling someone as a delinquent can have the effect of that person becoming the very thing he or she is described as being (Bartollas, 1997). Furthermore, he added that adolescents become involved with other delinquents in an attempt to escape from the society responsible for the negative labelling.

It is within this context that Lemert (in Shoemaker, 1996) introduced the concepts of primary and secondary deviance. Primary deviance refers to the initial deviant acts that can be caused by a multiplicity of factors. The exact cause is not of any importance, but rather, it is the process of secondary deviance which assumes salience within this model. Deviant acts are thereby committed in response to the consequences of being labelled a "delinquent" (Tranjanowicz & Morash, 1992). The application of these negative labels influences the adolescent's self-image until he or she eventually begins to identify him or herself as a delinquent. Furthermore, this is not only the effect of official labelling, but can also follow the process of self-labelling. Society is hence responsible for the creation of delinquency through a process of labelling those who are presumed different from other individuals. From within this approach, in reality the only difference is that these individuals have been inflicted with the label "deviant" (Bartollas, 1997).

It thus follows that deviance is not inherently good or bad. It is only labelled as such since the descriptions of deviance are a product of society's response to the behaviour. According to Lemert (in Bartollas, 1997), it is meaningful only since it elicits an "effective" form of social disapproval.

It is thus apparent that the above theories pertaining to disorganisation and social structure, as well as labelling theory, predominantly locate the site of the problem within the society of which the individual is a part. This is in sharp contrast to the psychological theories presented previously. There is still a clear direction of causation however, with social conditions viewed as causing the development of delinquent behaviour (it is only the direction of the cause which has in fact been changed).

3.4.3. Interpersonal and Situational Explanations

There are a number of assumptions which interpersonal and situational explanations of delinquency share in common (Shoemaker, 1996):

- Human behaviour, including delinquent behaviour, is flexible, not fixed. Behaviour changes in accordance with differing circumstances and situations.
- Most delinquent behaviour is found within a group or gang context.
- Peer associations and situational factors may lead to delinquent acts, in tandem or independently of each other.
- Delinquent behaviour, by implication of its situational embeddedness, ought to be conceptualised as such. Consequently, an individual should not be labelled as intrinsically delinquent, in the sense of a continuing identity. The individual is hence seen as engaging in "delinquent behaviour".

The Interpersonal theory of Edwin Sutherland (or the theory of Differential Association)

Sutherland asserts, in common with the behavioural approach, that all behaviour is learned (Shoemaker, 1996). By implication, social behaviour is learned behaviour, and is thus not genetically programmed. This behaviour is learned within small, informal groups and develops throughout the individual's involvement in multiple experiential contexts, as well as being influenced by specific situational, current events.

However, what leads to the commitment of delinquent acts in the moment? Sutherland invokes the concept of "differential association" to account for this process. As such, an adolescent engages in delinquent acts in response to an excess of attitudes favouring norm or law violation (Bartollas, 1997). This excess is largely developed in association with others.

Sutherland (in Shoemaker, 1996) extends this theory into the environmental context. He disagrees with the assumptions advocated by the anomie theory in that he does not see the environmental context as disorganised. Rather, he asserts that some areas are organised *differently.* There is some degree of organisation intrinsic to any social setting, regardless of whether this context is conducive to delinquency and crime, or not. Consequently, the norms, values, and behaviour patterns are merely differentially organised within these contexts, in such as way as to promote the likelihood of the development of delinquent behaviour.

Delinquency is thus considered to be learned within the context of interpersonal relationships. The "faulty" learning thus causes delinquent acts to occur (linear causality). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the person engaging in delinquent acts is a bad person – they are not intrinsically delinquent. Consequently, once environmental conditions change, the propensity for engaging in delinquent acts might also change. It is unclear, however, exactly

how this process occurs, that is, how does the adolescent develop an excess of attitudes in favour of law violation?

The Situational Explanation – David Matza's Drift

One of the central differentiating aspects of this theory is the salient position reserved for "free-will" and choice. It is assumed that the adolescent is in a position to make a choice regarding whether he or she will engage in a delinquent act (Bartol & Bartol, 1989). This choice is dependent upon the situation or circumstances at any particular moment. The "delinquent" is assumed capable of both law-abiding and delinquent behaviour, and their movements in and out of delinquency are referred to as "drifting". The adolescent may drift in and out of delinquency, depending on the situation, as well as his or her mood or feelings.

A mitigating factor in this regard may be the adolescent's feelings of injustice. In short, the adolescent may acquire this sense of injustice from the discriminatory law enforcement practices as well as the community's reactions they experience as a consequence of their delinquent actions. These adolescents may feel somewhat alienated from society.

Contributing to the adolescent's engagement in delinquent acts is what Matza refers to as a process of neutralisation (Bartol & Bartol, 1989). In fact, Matza (in Bartol & Bartol, 1989) asserts that neutralisation plays a central role in the adolescent's decision to commit a delinquent act. The adolescent neutralises or attempts to explain away the moral apprehension that may be associated with committing a particular delinquent act. There are five types of neutralisation:

1. Denial of responsibility (for example, "I have to do it because I am so poor, I have no choice.")
2. Denial of injury – "No one was harmed by what I did, they can just replace the goods with the insurance that they have."

3. Denial of a victim – "That man deserved to be robbed, he stole the goods he had in the first place!"
4. Condemnation of condemners – "Why should I listen to my mother when she tells me not to smoke crack, when she does so herself?"
5. Appeal to higher loyalties – "We have to beat-up the members of the Bomber gang – it's part of our gang's credo."

According to Matza (in Bartol & Bartol, 1989), the adolescent is not committed to any particular act of crime and can drift in and out at will. Psychological and environmental factors do not destine an adolescent to a life of crime and delinquency, the individual's free will influences the path that is eventually chosen. The "will to crime" develops once the youngster drifts into delinquency and his or her moral commitment to conventionality is neutralised.

Delinquency is hence a choice, made by the individual, and is influenced or caused by situational factors as well as the individual's mood or feelings (linear thinking). Cognitive factors thus play a role in the decision to commit an offence.

4. Adolescent Delinquency Evolves: A Systemic Approach

4.1 Introduction

With a recognition of the limitations of the modernist or linear approach to "problems" that was taking place within a number of disciplines, a systemic or cybernetic approach developed with a differential perspective on both "health" and "dysfunction". This field has evolved from first order cybernetics, through second order cybernetics, and has culminated into postmodern thinking, in the shape of the social constructionist paradigm within the field of psychology, a working definition of postmodernism. The reader may notice that although certain assumptions have radically shifted within first order cybernetics, remnants of linear punctuations remain. They still appear to advocate the truth of their own narrative as they struggle to leave the hallmarks of modernism behind.

4.2 The Structural Approach

Salvador Minuchin is generally regarded as the "father" of the structural approach. However, he is by no means the only theorist who has been involved in the development of this theoretical perspective. Other prominent proponents include Charles Fishman, B.L. Rosman, B. Montalvo, and B.G. Guerney. This is, of course, not an exhaustive list of those intimately connected with structural thinking.

The focus within the structural approach is, as the name suggests, on the structural organisation of the family (Minuchin, 1974). Essentially, the family system is comprised of three subsystems: the spouse, parental and sibling subsystems. Simultaneously, the family system is a subsystem of a larger community system, which is itself a subsystem of a larger system. As can be surmised, systems and subsystems are hierarchically organised. A typical hierarchical structure might look something like the following;

Society

Community

Family

Furthermore, within the family system, the parental subsystem is hierarchically situated at the top, exercising executive control over the sibling subsystem.

According to structural theory, these systems and subsystems are separated by means of boundaries. These invisible borders are formed through the process of interaction and become apparent through the observation of these dynamic patterns of interaction. The nature of these boundaries delineates who may communicate with whom, and about what, in other words, the rules of the system (Becvar & Becvar, 1996).

Crucial to an understanding of the structural approach is an appreciation of Minuchin's conceptualisation of the "flow" of information into and out of a system. Since this process creates both change and stability, it is intrinsic to any appreciation of health, growth, change and dysfunction. This information, by implication, flows through the boundaries. As a result, the nature of the boundaries, and hence the rules of the system, influence the nature and flow of this information. That which is perceived as too threatening or inconsistent with the values of the system may be screened out, thus retaining a natural balance in terms of the system's functioning. This process has been felicitously termed, "homeostasis" or the "homeostatic container" of the family system (Chamberlain & Rosicky, 1995).

So, what types of boundaries promote the development of dysfunctional behaviour, for example, delinquency? Within the ambit of the structural approach, both rigid and diffuse boundaries are considered problematic. Rigid boundaries have the effect of restricting contact between people. For example, a child experiencing difficulties may have to exacerbate the problematic behaviour (such as delinquency) before the parents are sufficiently mobilised to react. The result is thus disengagement within and between systems (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Diffuse boundaries have the opposite effect. Relationships between family members (or between family members and others external to the family system) become enmeshed as too much contact is allowed across generation lines or boundaries. For example, an adolescent may not be allowed the degree of freedom appropriate to his or her age. This may have the effect of the

adolescent having to assert his or her independence by engaging in delinquent acts.

An important aspect of this theory is its advocation of a circular epistemology. In effect, this implies that causation is circular, as opposed to linear. Problems are located within the context of relationships; it is the way in which people interact with each other that supports the development of problems. A "problem" such as delinquency is not to be found inside any one individual, but is rather maintained by the interactions between people, subsystems and systems (see examples above). The feedback loops in this context are circular, thus the difficulty in attempting to locate an initial cause for the development of the problem. The focus hence shifts to the relationship patterns connecting people in the present.

Congruent with this perspective, Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rosman and Schumer (1967) systematically examined and described delinquency as a function of family interaction and organisation. These authors concluded that the 'delinquent families' differed from 'nondelinquent families' in the following ways:

- They functioned less cooperatively and productively as a system.
- Mothers of "delinquents" relied more on behaviour control statements in attempting to discipline their children.
- Roles were not well differentiated and parental directives were less effective in modifying their children's behaviour.
- The family system was found to be functionally organised around the mother, with a coalition prevalent between mother and children, leaving the father or father figure out on the periphery, or absent.
- Members were either enmeshed with or disengaged from each other.

As a result of their research, these authors advanced that delinquency is a product of a chronic, maladaptive family organisation. Accordingly, it can be most effectively treated within the context of the family.

Congruent with the systemic perspective, it is imperative to acknowledge that how each person defines the problem will be slightly different. In fact, it is reasonable to believe that the "delinquent" may feel that his or her family is the problem, rather than locating the problem within the self. Take for example the following scenario, "My dad has no job and so we have no money, and both my parents are always drunk, how else am I supposed to survive?" Here the adolescent has located the parental subsystem as the cause of the problem. Conversely, the family may define the adolescent as the problem, asserting that things would be "just fine" if their child could "just be like normal kids". Structuralism transcends this "nit picking" to focus on the problematic structure, rather than attempting to ascribe individual blame. The family member's attributions of reality are still utilised, however, in the context of therapy.

Essentially, the structural therapist aims to restore the structure of the family to an appropriate form – clear boundaries between subsystems and a clear hierarchy where parents are firmly placed at the top (Minuchin & Fishman, 1982). Ideas and techniques utilized to change this structure differ from therapist to therapist, yet, the underlying assumptions are largely the same.

In terms of the application of this narrative to the treatment of delinquency, Fishman (1988) asserts that the idea of "adolescence" has arisen to serve a need that is unique to our society. This need has been shaped, in part, by the psychosocial factors impinging on our society. Treatment of an adolescent can therefore not take place apart from the social context within which it is embedded. This implies that "adolescent delinquency" is also a social creation, emanating from a particular perspective or world-view.

Acknowledging the influential effects of social context has persuaded Fishman (1988) that therapy must include the social context. He warns that a failure to do so creates the risk that we may fall into the trap Bateson (1979) has referred to as the "dormitive principle". The "problem" is that we expend energy treating the name of a problem rather than looking to the context that has created and

continues to maintain the problem – in this case, the problem of delinquent behaviour. The family should be the focus of the therapeutic encounter since this is the pivotal point of the multifaceted context affecting the adolescent. The family represents the context out of which the adolescent emerged, it is also the context which provides the most enduring relationships, and is usually a source of financial support. The pivotal role of the family thus ensures that it has the most resources for effecting change.

4.3 The Strategic Approach of Jay Haley

The strategic approach will not be presented in its entirety within this dissertation, since it would lead beyond its scope. The focus of the discussion will be on Haley's (1980) approach to dealing with problematic adolescents. In fact, Haley was the first to use the term "strategic" to describe any therapy in which the therapist assumes an active role in designing interventions to fit the problem (Hoffman, 1981). Clinicians associated with the strategic approach include Watzlawick, Beavin, Jackson, Weakland and Fisch (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967; Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974), Cloe Madanes (Madanes, 1980, 1981), as well as the ealier approach of the Milan Associates (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman & Penn, 1987, Selvini Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1978). The interested reader is referred to these sources.

However, Haley focuses on sequences of behaviour, communication patterns, as well as on the way in which the problem in maintained in the here and now. His approach is consistent with a first order cybernetic approach to therapy (Hoffman, 1981). Still, it is his use of strategies and directives to change problematic behaviour which defines him as a strategic therapist (as well as the fact that he defines himself in this way) (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Nonetheless, there is one defining feature that distinguishes Haley from other strategic therapists; his focus on family organisation, a relic from his work with Minuchin.

In terms of his work with adolescents, Haley does not distinguish between them in regard to their symptoms or problems (Haley, 1980). He believes that these differences are largely irrelevant for clinical purposes since when it comes to therapy the life stage of the person is more important than the symptom category. Nonetheless he does admit that the specific tactics to be used will differ with both the individual case and the type of problem. However, how does Haley understand problematic adolescents?

He asserts that "madness" is an expression of a malfunctioning family organisation. Within his book, "Leaving home" (Haley, 1980) he focuses specifically on problems that arise as a consequence of a family's difficulty in dealing with this issue. When a child reaches adolescence, it is appropriate for him or her to start disengaging from the family and to build more intimate relationships with others outside of the family. However, an inappropriate family structure can prevent this from taking place, thereby creating problems. The adolescent's symptom is hence a product, or a communication about, this inappropriate organisation. It is a natural response to a problematic context.

In terms of the adolescents, Haley (1980) believes that no matter what the diagnosis, they each have something in common; they fail to live normal lives. Consequently, their families must remain involved with them. Essentially, the adolescents adhere to one of two extremes of behaviour. They either act out and make trouble or they withdraw and are apathetic and helpless. This dissertation is focused on the former. As already mentioned, the problematic behaviour emerges at the time when the adolescent is preparing to leave home. However, the family organisation creating and maintaining the problem varies. For example, in one instance the child may have difficulty leaving home if the only members of the nuclear family are mother and child. When the adolescent eventually leaves, the family will be disrupted, possibly leaving the mother lonely and isolated. In another instance, the parents might communicate through one of the children. However, should that child leave home the parents will be faced with no other option but to communicate with each other directly if they are to

remain in the relationship. The triadic relationship pattern stabilises the marriage as the child distracts the parents from their marital difficulties. In cases such as these when the family is in trouble as a child prepares to leave home, there is one solution available – for the child to stay at home.

Haley (1980) contends that one of the ways in which this can be accomplished is for the adolescent to develop symptoms that prevent him or her from succeeding in life. In this way, the adolescent continues to need the parents. The symptom then functions to allow the family to remain unchanged as the family structure remains unchanged. The family cannot move on to the next life-stage but organises instead around the identified patient in an attempt to remain the same.

Haley describes the cycle which acts to perpetuate the problem (Haley, 1980). As the adolescent begins to prepare to leave home and begins to succeed outside of the family within the school or work context, the family starts to become unstable. This instability represents the catalyst for the emergence of troublesome behaviour. However, even though all family members seem to be upset and are displaying unusual behaviour, the behaviour of the identified patient is more extreme. At this time, the family members focus their attention on this adolescent and the family organisation begins to stabilise. The family approaches outside institutions to request help. However, this has the effect of stabilising the organisation even further as the executive position of the parents is undermined when authorities take control of the situation. The adolescent is defined as ill or defected at this time, ensuring that he or she is no longer considered ready to leave home. As the family organisation stabilises, the adolescent improves and is then discharged. However, this gradual improvement has the effect of destabilising the family yet again as the adolescent prepares to leave home. The cycle repeats itself.

Therapy with these families should be aimed at increasing the power and authority of the parents so that an appropriate parental or executive subsystem is in place (recall the importance of an appropriate family hierarchy from the

discussion of the structural approach above). In order to do this, the therapist might intervene to make overt any cross-generational coalitions or to strengthen and encourage more appropriate alliances. Consequently, it is important for the parents to define their marriage as their own problem so that they do not need the child to stabilise their relationship (Haley, 1980). This draws the generation line and corrects the hierarchy. The focus should also be on the adolescent leading a normal or healthy life with the parents in charge. As the family reorganises into a more appropriate structural organisation a new stability is formed. The child is then free to leave home without the threat of the disintegration of the family.

There are numerous family organisations which can have problematic implications for leaving home. A discussion of all of these is beyond the scope of the dissertation. Essentially however, according to Haley (1980) it is the difficulty leaving home, a consequence of an inappropriate family organisation, which leads to the development of problems such as delinquency. Correcting this family organisation will have the effect of changing the feelings and perceptions of the family members. The delinquent behaviour will then no longer be required to stabilise the family system.

Consider for a moment the assumptions informing this approach. The problem is not to be found within the individual, but within the family's structural organisation. The problem is maintained by the way in which the family members interact with each other within this system. It is thus circular causal dynamics which operate to maintain the problem, which is a communication about the state of the system.

4.4 Family Ecological Systems

This is an approach which integrates narratives and research findings from several disciplines which concern themselves with the social and emotional

functioning of adolescents and their families (Henggeler, 1982). An attempt is made to provide a view of adolescent behaviour that highlights the numerous ecological influences that impinge upon the adolescent, as well as including a consideration of the adolescent's impact upon the environment.

The adolescent is hence seen as being embedded within several systems and subsystems, with which he or she is in continual interaction. This theory thus shares numerous similarities with the structural approach – there is a focus on systems and subsystems and the family is seen as the most salient system influencing the adolescent. The family is also considered to be composed of various subsystems – the parents, father-adolescent dyad, mother-adolescent dyad, siblings, and members of the extended family. Systems that the adolescent interacts with outside of the family system include peers, school personnel and the neighbourhood residents. According to Henggeler (1982), these systems, together with the interconnections between them, have a significant impact of the behaviour of the adolescent.

Henggeler (1982) outlines certain principles that operate as the adolescent interacts with the environment. One of these principles, congruent with a systemic approach, is the assumption that interpersonal transactions are reciprocal in nature. This translates into the assumption that the adolescent is influenced by the family-ecological systems discussed earlier, whilst also simultaneously influencing these systems. Further, due to the intricate interconnectedness of systems and subsystems, the adolescent does not have to be in immediate contact with a particular system in order for this reciprocal influence to occur.

A second principle is that transactions that are considered to be deviant or pathological are often adaptive when the adolescent's ecological context is taken into account. Family therapists would agree that the problematic behaviour exhibited by children and adolescents frequently acts to stabilise and maintain a dysfunctional family system. The deviant behaviour may also be serving a

purpose in peer and neighbourhood systems, providing the adolescent with short-term gains. The focus in this model is therefore on transactions within and between pertinent systems, with an aim to changing these transactions to improve the functioning of independent members.

4.5. Multi-Systemic Structural – Strategic Interventions

Tolan and Mitchell (1990) present a structural-strategic approach to family therapy with antisocial and delinquent behaviour in children. They combine components of behavioural, structural as well as strategic family therapy with individual sessions for the identified patient. Congruent with the Structural approach, the goal is to develop more adaptive boundaries and alliances, to clarify the family processes, to articulate shared family values and conflicts and to build communication and social skills. The behaviour of the adolescent is assumed to maintain the status quo of the system and as a consequence, interventions on these multiple levels have an effect on family interactions. Consequently, such an approach is considered essential to ending the system maintaining function of the behaviour. This system maintaining behaviour is regarded to be influenced by the interaction between individual, family, and extra-familial forces which operate in such a way as to promote the undesired behaviour or, as a restraint against any form of change.

4.6. Other family therapy approaches

In general, family therapy approaches assert that the families of delinquents may be differentiated from other families by their interactional sequences and processes (Tolan, Cromwell & Brasswell, 1986). Systemic qualities that are often emphasised include the following;

a) ineffective, contradictory or weak parental authority,

b) disjointed or unclear communication within the family which becomes particular apparent around conflict resolution, and
c) the functional value of the delinquent's behaviour within the family

Nevertheless, in terms of delinquency, the available research within the general field of family therapy suggests that there are five aspects of family interactions that are likely to differentiate the family systems of delinquents from those of non-delinquents (Tolan et. al. 1986):

- The family systems of delinquent adolescent's are characterised by more frequent parental disagreements and conflicting directives toward the children.
- These families exhibit less differentiation in terms of parental and child influence on family decisions. The families of delinquents have been found to have equalitarian or child-skewed power distributions (inverted hierarchies).
- The members of the family express less positive affect and more negative affect.
- Members are more likely to misperceive a greater proportion of communication, and
- Within these families the general sentiment is one of an unwillingness to compromise which is apparent in their communications with each other.

Moreover, there have been numerous studies conducted regarding the family therapy of delinquents or children exhibiting conduct disorder features. A discussion of all of these narratives is beyond the scope of this proposal. The above thus constitutes examples of family therapy approaches and many similarities can already be traced through the different perspectives.

It is evident that the field of family therapy has offered a radically different approach when compared with the linear approaches to delinquency. The family therapy or systemic approaches are based in systems theory and first order cybernetics, and thus have their foundations in different epistemology, resulting in differing assumptions regarding problem development and resolution.

So what are these differing assumptions?
The systemic or cybernetic theories above share the following epistemological assumptions. The problem does not reside within the identified patient, but is rather a problem belonging to the whole system (that is, the family). It is the way in which the family members interact with each other, and with others outside of the family system, which serves to sustain a problem like delinquency. The patterns of interaction are circular in nature, and as a result, causality is circular. The linear conception of causality is considered simplistic and provides only a limited view of how the problem came about. The circular and interconnecting feedback loops need to be identified in order to achieve a more holistic perspective regarding the problem.

5. A Second Evolution: A Second Order Cybernetic / Ecosystemic Approach to Delinquency

Thus far, this chapter has elucidated both modernist and first order cybernetic approaches to adolescent delinquency. However, what would constitute a second order approach to delinquency? Any attempt to present a second order approach is by no means a small endeavour. In fact, once one has made the transition to second order thinking, problematic behaviour dissolves and loses its characteristic shape as a problem carved upon the template called "reality". The question emerges as to whether problems actually exist from this perspective.

The answer to this central question is both yes and no. Since we cannot peel away the layers in the endeavour to locate a single, objective reality, we cannot hope to find any "real problems". We thus have no means of ascertaining the truth-value of a problem defined in a particular way. The clarity of the problem is even further obscured once one accepts that multiple perspectives co-exist as each individual attempts to make sense of the world of which he or she is a part. As each person participates within the complex web of everyday interactions, he

or she ascribes his or her own definitions or perspectives on that which is observed; each draws his or her own distinctions (Keeney, 1983). For example, Mrs A may present herself as a helpless victim, powerless to do anything about her son's problematic behaviour. Her helpless style of interacting may initially have the effect of mobilising others to support her. However, as her supporters become exasperated by her continual plea for assistance, her behaviour might eventually fail to elicit the desired support, which, in turn, may lead to her doing more of the same, as well as engendering feelings of rejection of worthlessness. Her style of interaction may then take on the appearance of a clinical depression as Mrs A increases the intensity of her helpless and powerless stance in her attempt to be heard and supported by others. However, the result may be that she feels completely abandoned and unsupported. The cumulative effect is that she lives out a life story fraught with problems in which she is ultimately the victim of circumstances beyond her control. Hence, problem saturated stories emerge from both the interactional patterns in which the individual is engaged, as well as from the manner in which the individual draws distinctions: both are intricately linked. It therefore follows that a problem is only a problem if it is perceived as such – it exists within the mind of the person defining it and not in an external, knowable reality.

Consequently, from the perspective of second order cybernetics, a problem such as delinquency is sustained by the ecology of ideas (the ways in which the interactants think about or define the problem) surrounding the problem. Consider the example provided above. Jack, Mrs A's son, may believe that his mother is pathetic and ineffectual. Consequently, he behaves in such a way as to prove that he is nothing like her, his style of interaction is assertive and aggressive as he tries to manipulate his environment to get what he wants. He believes he has to be this way or others will walk over him as they walk over his mother. Although his definition of the problem is different, it is clear that the manner in which both he and his mother think about their circumstances is serving to perpetuate the problem. The system is hence constituted by all those in language about the problem, including the therapist (Hoffman, 1994).

Delinquency, therefore, does not objectively exist "out there" in the "real world", but is created and sustained by the manner in which we co-ordinate ourselves around that behaviour we have defined as deviant or problematic. Efforts made to find a solution for a problem defined as delinquency may themselves serve to define and sustain the problem.

Consider yet again the example of Mrs A and her son Jack. Mrs A blames her son as well as the lack of support from others as the cause of the problem. Jack reciprocates by accusing his mother for being helpless and pathetic, thereby citing her as the source of the problem in an attempt to justify his rebellion. The attempts that each of them make to deal with or solve the problem as they see it, have actually become a part of the problem. If only Jack would refrain from attempting to compensate for his mother's behaviour, she would not need to appear helpless in order to gain the support of others. If only Mrs A would stop being so concerned, and thereby terminate her attempts to appear helpless and thereby gain the support of others, Jack would not need to compensate for his mother's behaviour. In the absence of the other's attempted solution, or the way in which they co-ordinate themselves around the defined problem, the problem essentially evaporates, or fails to exist.

Another important aspect of a second order approach is the acknowledgement of the interdependence between the observer and the observed. I may punctuate behaviour as problematic and describe it as I see it, yet this cannot be done from the stance of an objective and uninvolved observer. My behaviour will influence that which I see (as well as the direction that the interaction will take) and my pre-existing ideas and interactions will influence the story I generate to explain what I see. As a result, the "observer" is always faced with his or her own ideas regarding the delinquent behaviour and never an objective account of what is actually the case.

The reader may be wondering at this point where all these ideas leave us when confronted with a problem defined as delinquency. Do we accept the definition?

How can we change a problem that only exists in other's minds? Worse still, taken to its logical conclusion, there are as many problems and perspectives regarding the problem as there are people communicating about it. How can we hope to create any shifts or changes when this task looms virtually insurmountable before us? The answer is, we do not. Congruent with a second order perspective is the acceptance that we cannot actually ever change a system or ecology of ideas. We can only change ourselves and the ways in which we interact and think about the problem, and then become aware of the reverberating effects on the system in which we are embedded. We can only hypothesise about how the problem came about and what is sustaining the problem and introduce new ideas and new ways of seeing the problem. The client /s will respond to the therapist's ideas and actions in accordance with their own ideas regarding the problem, and as a result, the direction of change cannot be predicted nor controlled. The therapeutic system or ecology of ideas thus takes on a life of its own, evolving into a co-creation of all involved in defining and redefining the problem.

As an example, it might be useful to consider the anecdote provided above. It is not that the conceptualisation or hypothesis regarding the systemic interaction between Mrs A and her son Jack is correct or true in the modernist sense, but it may prove to be useful in the context of therapy. It is thus possible, and even useful, to use a first order approach to therapy and problems, whilst keeping in mind the second order principles. In the case of Mrs A and Jack, through the context of therapy the way in which they co-ordinate themselves around the problem would be described as both they and the therapist create a new story together. The story may read something like the following; Mrs A and Jack are both overcompensating for perceived inadequacies in terms of the other person's capabilities for handling the current dilemma. Instead of working together, they are attempting to solve the problem independently (a story / explanation which did not exist prior to the conversation between Mrs A, Jack and the therapist). Therapy might hence focus on a dialogue intended to foster a co-operative style of interaction between them, as they endeavour to solve the newly defined

problem together. This particular therapeutic conversation has evolved out of the life circumstances which have been formed in language by Mrs A and Jack, as well as the therapist's interpretation (and hence re-languaging) of the constructed story. Consequently, it cannot be lifted out of context and used as a technique for all cases of adolescent delinquency. See Snyders, Fourie and le Roux (1988) in this regard.

There are therefore no tangible techniques that can be unilaterally applied. Therapy becomes a language game and ideas are moulded and remoulded as the therapist and client / s engage in a collaborative dialogue in the endeavour to alleviate the problem. This may also take the form of redefining delinquency not as deviant but rather as necessary rebellion to separate from the family, to assert independence and autonomy (there are hence multiple ways of defining delinquency). As the recipe-book of therapeutic techniques is abandoned by the therapist, the second order clinician develops his or her own therapeutic stance; there is no one way of dealing with a problem defined as delinquency. A second order approach thus invites a flexibility absent from a first order perspective, but with this the certainty created by the arsenal of therapeutic techniques is wrenched away, as the therapist abdicates his or her throne and takes his or her place as part of the problem-determined system (Hoffman, 1994).

With these ideas in mind, the underlying assumptions of this approach can be summarised as follows. We cannot come to know an independent, objectively knowable reality; we can only interact with our own perspective of this reality. Each person develops his or her own idiosyncratic view which is influenced by the interactions engaged in with others. The language we share with others is employed in shaping these multiple perspectives. The observer and observed are intimately and intricately connected – they mutually influence each other. The observer's own ideas influence his or her perspective regarding that which is observed. The problem is embedded within redundant patterns of interaction as manifested in the ecology of ideas which are maintaining and sustaining the defined problem, it does not objectively exist, out there in the real world. It is

therefore the manner in which people language about and interact around the problem which should be the focus of attention, not the individual defined as the problem. The consideration of causality falls ways as it is not required in order to effect change. Any perspective on causality would merely constitute one possible account among many, and thus would not be endowed with any truth-value. Human interaction is complex and thus any attempt to make sense of causality is simplistic in comparison. We can only change ourselves and cannot act instrumentality to change others. They will respond to our changed behaviour in accordance with their own perspectives and ideas.

6. Concluding Comments: The past and the present converge. Where to from here?

The theories presented in this chapter have been separated according to the author's epistemological distinctions. Essentially, theories emanating from within a linear epistemology have been discussed first. It would be safe to say that the majority of the approaches which have been generated regarding adolescent delinquency take root within linear or modernist assumptions. In other words, they each seek to reveal the cause for the development of delinquent behaviour, that is, the antecedents which have lead to the development of the problem in a unilateral or linear fashion. Once causation has been identified, contingencies can then be developed to control, predict, or eradicate the problem.

Nonetheless, the modernist approach has not been able to provide all of the answers regarding the development and prevalence of adolescent delinquency in our society. No theory has been able to account for the development of all cases of delinquent behaviour, nor offer sound and workable solutions regarding how to ameliorate the problem. It is the authors contention that part of the inadequacy inherent in modernist approaches is to be found within the limitations which flow from the underlying assumptions. These limitations will be discussed within the

context of the following chapter, as the reader embarks upon a journey through a social constructionist stance.

However, for the present, it might be helpful to consider why the theories regarding delinquency have undergone a metamorphosis in terms of epistemological assumptions. Furthermore, how do we go about judging the adequacy of any particular theory as well as the epistemology that informs that theory?

These are not easy questions to answer. Of course, it seems to be common sense that since we live in a multi-faceted society, an equally multi-faceted theory or set of theories would be required to describe and explain those phenomena occurring on a daily basis. Nevertheless, in considering these questions it is imperative to acknowledge that an answer requires an argument grounded from within a particular epistemology. It is our epistemology that influences the distinctions we draw as we observe the world around us; our epistemology shapes the lens through which we see the world. One cannot escape epistemology, a point that is illustrated through the recognition that these very assertions regarding epistemology are influenced by the author's epistemological assumptions. Thus it is important to become aware of and to acknowledge our assumptions. This awareness can free us up to challenge our own epistemology as we begin to recognise the ways in which they influence the way we think and act. Nonetheless, we find that we consequently have a modified or perhaps, rather different epistemology. We cannot stand outside of it. But where do these ideas leave us in considering the effectiveness of theory?

Our critique of any theory carries with it the assumptions of the underlying epistemology. Linear theories that are critiqued from an approach congruent with a linear epistemology will tend to focus on the content of the theory. The underlying assumptions (for instance, a linear cause can be found, it can be objectively identified, the individual is the locus of the problem) are left largely uncontested. The critique will lodge its assault against the contesting theory's

attempts to account for the causative principles. For example, a behavioural approach might criticise the medical model's assertion that delinquency is caused by biological factors. Instead, adherents of a behavioural perspective will argue that delinquent behaviour is learned behaviour – the adolescent has learned bad behaviour and this is the cause of the problem. They will not challenge the assumption of linear causality; this kind of critique takes place from the perspective of an opposing epistemology. This kind of critique has the effect of questioning the underlying assumptions of a model that may lead to fruitful revisions and expansions in terms of how we think about a particular subject. Consequently, the second epistemological distinction drawn in this chapter is that of first order cybernetics, a systemic epistemology.

So what will the advocate of first order cybernetics assert that will challenge modernist ideas and aid in the expansion of theory? In the first instance, the assumptions of linear causality will be challenged. The advocate of a first order approach will show how linear causality provides only a partial, simplistic view of the phenomena in question. He or she will show how it is "incorrect" to position the individual as the locus of pathology and will instead relocate the problem into the interpersonal realm. They will describe how a problem develops between people in interaction, as well as the mutual influence that the existence of multiple perspectives has on the development of the problem. As the proponent of a first order view acknowledges the creation of multiple perspectives, so the existence of a universal truth is contested. Systemic theories will hence reflect these underlying assumptions, and it is along these lines of critique that modernist approaches are challenged, and thereby the field of delinquency theory is expanded. However, the expansion is at this stage still incomplete, since the next stage in the metamorphosis is the emergence of a second order cybernetic perspective.

Thus, similar critical reflections can be advanced regarding first order cybernetic approaches to delinquency. These criticisms can be launched from either within a first order epistemology, or from within a differing epistemology (such as

modernism or second order cybernetics). An example of a criticism emanating from within the epistemology may look something like the following. Adherents of the Communications Approach might contest the strong focus on structural organisation advocated by the Structural Approach, arguing instead that familial communication patterns do not receive enough attention and should be articulated more fully by a comprehensive theory regarding family functioning. The content of the theory has been hereby challenged, although the epistemological assumptions (for example, the problem exists between people rather than inside the identified patient) are implicitly accepted. Nonetheless, a critique from within another epistemology will have differing implications for how that theory is challenged.

From within the realm of a second order perspective, the epistemological assumptions underlying a first order approach become exposed and contested. The proponent of a second order approach will show how it becomes difficult to unravel a circular causal pattern, and that the explanation developed as a consequence can not be assumed to represent the truth, or the way things really are. Thus, one should relinquish a focus on causation as a search for what caused the development of the problem in the first place. Each perspective regarding the cause would nonetheless constitute only one perspective among many plausible explanations. It is thus no more accurate to say that family structure or family communication lead to the development of delinquent behaviour. Rather, the focus turns toward explanations that may be deemed useful, rather than true. Furthermore, the advocate of a second order approach would show how the problem exists in the minds of those in language about the problem, thereby revealing the manner in which the problem creates the system rather than the system (such as a family) creating the problem. As already indicated, the role which language plays in the maintenance of the problem becomes a factor to be considered. A first order approach would hence be criticised for not considering these factors.

As the reader might already anticipate, the second order approach has not escaped the wrath of critical reflection. Yet again, these challenges have emanated from both within a second order epistemology, as well as from within the territory of a differing epistemology. In the following chapter, the author's comments are couched firmly within a social constructionist epistemology. The author will assist the reader to appreciate the intrinsic weaknesses of the second order cybernetic perspective from a social constructionist stance. Furthermore, the current conceptions (theories) of delinquency will be relocated into a context of social constructionism.

So, does this mean that the theories presented in this chapter are to be thrown out and deemed outdated and no longer useful? Have they necessarily been replaced by a more redeeming theory or epistemology? These questions essentially constitute the platform from which the author will venture into the imaginative world of social constructions. Herein lies an implicit invitation for the reader to accompany the author on this odyssey of epistemological exploration.

CHAPTER 4

Considerations about the Socially Constructed nature of "Delinquency"

1. Introduction

The previous chapter was devoted to a presentation of the various theories of delinquency. Throughout the chapter, the reader was guided along an epistemological evolution, from modernist approaches, through to a second order cybernetic approach. This chapter represents the next stage in this evolution- a consideration of delinquency from a social constructionist stance. It is the primary goal of this chapter to show how delinquency is a social construction, how it arises from the context of interactions that are embedded in prevalent cultural discourses.

Consistent with these goals, individual "delinquent" behaviour will be contextualised to show how everything, and in this case "delinquency", is created through the way meaning and identity is negotiated in relationships. Consideration will be lent to how pathology is not an intrinsic characteristic of the individual, and that even the theories that have been designed to account for pathology can themselves be seen as socially constructed. The central aim of this chapter is to show that we are no longer blinded by modernist theories that claim to know objective truth. This is achieved through the attempt to transcend competing theories as their socially constructed character is realised. This argument will henceforth furnish the reader with a vantage point from which to evaluate the pragmatic utility of even modernist theories, but still to refrain from succumbing to the seductive illusions of their truth value.

2. Social Constructionism and "Delinquency": An Evolution in the Epistemological Metamorphosis

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 the following social constructionist assumptions were introduced (Gergen, 1999):

- Language cannot mirror reality, but is performative. "We do things" with and in language and participate in everyday "language games".
- Meaning is not reflected in language nor does it originate from inside an individual's mind, but is co-constructed between people in relationship.
- We cannot ever declare that we have access to an objective truth, independent of the human mind. Instead, we participate in sustaining and maintaining meaning through multiply constructed epistemologies and ontologies, or ways of being. To speak of objective truth is hence a rhetorical achievement whereby certain ways of being are privileged over others within the discourse. We thus participate within the discourse of truth.
- We have the potential for multiple selves that are co-constructed within the context of multiple relationships.

However, how exactly is meaning co-created within the context of relationships? In what way does this apply to "delinquency"? What does this have to do with the potential for multiple selves? Ways in which social constructionist thought can be applied to delinquency are considered in this chapter.

2.2 The social construction of the label "delinquency": "Delinquency" as a Communal Artefact

Social constructionism, as has already been established, has renounced the epistemological presupposition that "truth" can be conveyed through language (Shotter, 1993). Shotter (1993) and Gergen (1994) justify their departure from this epistemological stance by considering the everyday descriptions of ordinary people. For example, if Cindy refers to Jemma as "warm" and "sensitive", what exactly is this a picture of?

A contradiction is revealed in that the language we use to describe others and ourselves is informed by a rigid system of categorisation. This system of categorisation rests on the premise that words denote objects. That is, to describe someone as aggressive implies that aggression is a stable component of an invariant personality structure. The contradiction is thus unmasked by the recognition that people are in a state of continuous motion. It is from this that one can infer that language fails to reflect the fluidity of how people adapt and thus change relative to diverse relational contexts.

According to Goodman (in Gergen, 1994, p.36-42) literary theorists have attempted to demonstrate that the general descriptions generated of people are not determined by the contours of the real world "out there" but rather by the conventions of literary rendering. Hence, conceptions of the world and people are a product of a linguistic as opposed to a cognitive process.

The language we acquire is learned through a process of co-operative interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978). It is hence through relationships that we come to define things the way that we do and develop our shared understandings about "the way things are done". Our ideas about ourselves, others, as well as the world around us are thus by-products of patterns of interactions. By implication, the focus shifts from the confines of the individual "mind" to the context of ever-shifting interactional processes between people. Language and understanding

are generated at the level of human relationship (Gergen, 1999; Watzawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967).

If language does not reflect the contours of an objective world, then how do descriptive terms come to have heuristic value in our everyday interactions with the world? Although the notion of "language games" was introduced as one of the defining features of social constructionist epistemology, it will now be useful to show how "language games" operate in constructing realities. To reiterate, Wittgenstein replaces the "picture" metaphor of language with the metaphor of "language games" (Stumpf, 1982). Gergen (1999) clarifies this point with a chess analogy. Chess is characterised by the fact that there are explicit rules regarding when and how each piece can be moved across the board. Furthermore, these explicit rules are also accompanied by implicit rules of social conduct, that is, how one is expected to behave toward one's opponent. Moreover, each piece in the chess set acquires its meaning from the game as a whole. Wittgenstein (in Stumpf, 1982) argues that words acquire meaning in much the same way. As an illustration, consider the following example. To say "I love you" acquires meaning from a "game-like" ritual referred to as a "love affair" in western culture. The major implication is that there are certain implicit rules for the successful performance of this ritual – to hit one's partner is considered "out of the game" and is consequently labelled unacceptable. However, if the same behaviour is relocated to the context of "boxing" the meaning will change.

Austin (1962), a protégé of Wittgenstein, elaborates Wittgenstein's thesis that language is performative. He asserts that we do things with words. Through the words that we use to describe and explain, we engage in a performance of some kind. For example, to engage in a display of rebellion is performative in the sense that the "observers" are aware of their culturally and situationally expected roles within this "game" (Gergen, 1994; Goffman, 1990; Stumpf, 1982;). There are implicit rules that must be followed in order to successfully perform "rebellion". Rebellion would be unsuccessful without the cooperation of others.

To legitimise rebellion an authority must assert his or her position of power by either reproaching or threatening the adolescent with punishment.

Moreover, rebellion will be ineffective or inadequate to the point that defying an authority with a soft voice and a tender smile would not constitute a significant threat of subversion toward the institution of authority whether parents or police, and so on. From this example it is clear that the performance of rebellion is validated by virtue of how it is qualified nonverbally. Consider that an adolescent who has a history of violence and theft is taken more seriously than an 11 year old child who rebels against his or her parents by protesting against their instruction that he or she should bath once a day.

Austin's (1962) analysis confirms that the performative function of language and the corresponding conventions that mediate "language games" are not merely verbal. The anecdote above illustrates that gestures and facial expressions both contribute to the context that renders speech meaningful, endowing the speech act with a particular performative function within a relationship. Gergen (1999) asserts that there are only a limited number of nonverbal expressions that can successfully qualify an utterance. Consider for example, the illustration of rebellion provided above. There are only a limited number of nonverbal expressions that may appropriately qualify and thereby successfully achieve the relational pattern we call rebellion. It was observed that to qualify an act of rebellion with a smile and a soft tone of voice will not qualify the act in this way.

The discussion to follow will consider how it is that meaning is created within the context of ongoing relatedness. Although the relationship between action and supplement was briefly discussed in Chapter 2, what is demanded by the context of the present discussion is to illustrate how meaning is created by way of the interaction between action and supplement.

An example pertinent to the theme of delinquency will prove useful in this regard. The defining feature of delinquency is rebellion – against parents, the law, in fact,

against authority. Consider the scenario whereby the adolescent proclaims that he or she will no longer attend school. However, this action does not in and of itself require any particular reciprocal reaction or supplementation. It is the act of supplementation that imbues the initial act with meaning. A typical response or supplementation might be for the parents to reproach the adolescent, followed by a display of power designed to intimidate the adolescent into submission. This would define the act as having a particular meaning – an attempt to rebel against parental authority. Hypothetically, if the parent were to respond with, "Excellent! We should do lunch tomorrow then!" this would define the action differently, possibly as a joke. It is at this point that the supplement stands in the same position as the initial utterance or action, thereby inviting certain forms of action. The adolescent might have responded to his or her parent's reproachment so as to relocate the meaning. This might be achieved with a statement such as the following, "Aw, mom! (laughing) Don't be so uptight, you always take things far too seriously!" In this case, the meaning is redefined as playful bantering. However, the precarious balance of meaning could have tipped in the other direction with the adolescent responding aggressively, "Like you can make me!" thereby inviting his or her parents to participate in creating the relational pattern called "rebellion".

It is through this precarious relationship between action and supplement that the meaning "rebellion" or "delinquency" (or any other meaning) is negotiated within the context of relationships. Meaning is precariously negotiated in moment-to-moment interactions. No individual that engages in any particular form of interaction is a passive recipient of meaning; rather meaning is co-created between interlocutors (Gergen, 1994).

More specifically, an utterance acquires meaning through the way in which others co-ordinate themselves to that utterance (Shotter, 1993). Thus, meaning is temporary, subject to modification through the chain of supplementary signification. In this way, the relationship between initial action and supplement is a reciprocal one.

Hence, the interlocutors do not have unilateral control over the meaning-making process. Our immersion in previous relationships also provides us with a potential for meaning. During the contexts of our previous interactional sequences, we learned an array of supplements (both verbal and nonverbal aspects thereof) that may or may not be congenial to a new relational context (Gergen, 1994; 1999). We use this potential within the context of ongoing relationships and may thus appear to be "stuck" within old patterns of interaction if we are unable to supplement actions differently in the present. This potential may thus be revised or modified within the context of current interactions through the way in which others now supplement our initial actions as well as by how we supplement the actions of others. According to Gergen (1994), "we borrow, reformulate, and patch together various pieces of preceding relationships in order to achieve local coordination of the moment" (p. 267).

From the above discussion, it is implied that an act or utterance cannot be inherently indicative of delinquency or rebellion. In this regard Gergen, Hepburn and Fisher (1990) have shown that personality variables do not reflect an actuality "out there". Rather, variables and actions are loosely associated such that seemingly quite disparate actions can be seen as indicative of the same personality variable. Instead it is the way in which the initial action is supplemented that confirms it as indicative of "rebellion" or "delinquency". Thus the development of "delinquency" is a process of mutual definition or co-construction between people. Supplementing an action differently and thereby bringing new meaning to the action opens up alternatives for different forms of relatedness to emerge (that is, different patterns of interaction). However, the reader might retort at this stage that the parents or authorities are not as free as it might seem from an academic perspective to supplement the adolescent's action or utterance differently. What other factors are there therefore that impinge on the meaning-making process? Further, how is it that the interactional sequences evolve into the meaningful pattern of interaction termed "delinquency"?

Although it would seem from the foregoing discussion that interactions are largely random, in practice they tend more toward redundant interactional sequences thereby becoming imbued with transparent and obvious meaning to the interlocutors (Shotter, 1983). Consider the sequences illustrated above, should this interactional scenario continue, so that the parent is defined as one to be rebelled against (the authority figure), and the adolescent is defined as attempting to rebel, the predominant interactions between parents and adolescent might assume the meaning of "rebellion".

Of course, this micro-level meaning-making process is potentiated by and therefore constrained by the discourses of rebellion and delinquency. These discourses are informed by the theories that were elucidated in the literature review. It is at this level that the rituals of rebellion and delinquency are richly described. People generally invoke these perspectives either unwittingly or deliberately to describe and explain the behaviour of others. The prevalent cultural discourses that permeate society thus influence individuals so that they become docile bodies, subjected to the effects of this discourse. People largely accept these discourses as true and therefore do not question the validity or usefulness of them for their own lives. These discourses are perceived as objective explanations that are invoked to evaluate the normative and the deviant behaviour of others. The individual thus participates in his or her own subjugation by virtue of inhabiting a particular cultural discourse (Foucault, 1996; Gergen, 1990).

The adoption of these criteria implies particular ways of supplementing actions that can be defined as rebellious. This is achieved by virtue of the rich descriptions rendered of what it is that constitutes rebellion (or delinquency), why it is a problem, and what should be done to eliminate it. Once this meaning is ascribed to an action, it then becomes difficult for the interlocutors to mean anything else since their behaviours will be interpreted in relation to the stringent behavioural criteria prescribed by the discourse. A passive acceptance of

dominant discourse thereby encapsulates individuals within rigid parameters of meaning and living, whilst denying the validity of alternative ways of perceiving and supplementing the same actions.

It is by virtue of defining behaviour as a problem and supplementing it in this way that we lock ourselves into a self-defeating prism of interactions and thus exacerbate the situation. In the desperate attempt to solve a problem defined in language (within the culture and the interpersonal meaning-making process) the problem defined as "delinquency" is created. This ironically supports and reifies the discourse thereby transforming a perspective into a statement of absolute truth. The relationship between micro-processes and macro-processes is thus a reciprocal one that serves to perpetuate "delinquency" within western society.

2.3 The "delinquent identity" peeled from the fruit of a modernist tree

As the focus shifts from the individual to the relational context, so do the implications for individual identity. If meaning is constituted in relationship and is undecidable until the moment of supplementation, then it is reasonable to assume that self-narratives or identities do not reside within the individual. In fact, by implication, as we participate in many diverse contexts and forms of life, it follows that we participate in the co-construction of multiple identities. This reasoning is enhanced when we consider our immersion within a technological culture which provides us with multiple perspectives on the world, and thus multiple ways of interacting with the world to which we have been previously unexposed. According to McNamee (1996), "technological advances made in the current century have virtually expanded the web of possible forms of relating simply by offering seemingly infinite characterisations of diverse groups of people" (p. 141). An illustrative example in this regard is the internet, which has made possible the development and maintenance of relationships which would previously have been impossible. These relationships provide us with new and different forms of supplementation as well as with a means of showing different

aspects of ourselves to different people, thereby expanding our interactional repertoire. However, what are the implications for the conception of the delinquent self or identity?

As meaning is relationally created, so are our self-narratives or identities (McNamee, 1996). As we participate in multiple relationships, so do we participate in the co-construction of multiple selves. Identities are hence a by-product of interpersonal interaction. As our interactions achieve a consistency or redundant pattern of interaction, so do they participate in the creation of identity. Actions that are frequently supplemented in such a way as to achieve the definition of "rebellion" (see example above) have the effect of exacerbating the situation. If the other party, such as a parent, continually supplements with the meaning "rebellion", then it becomes difficult for the adolescent to mean anything else. This exacerbation could eventually lead to a confrontation with the law (another authoritative body), an institution which supplements all adolescent acts of rebellion which have the effect of breaking the law in the same way – as signifying "delinquency". The adolescent's identity is thereby initially co-constructed as "rebellious", and then later as "delinquent". As the rebellious or delinquent identity is created, a culturally pervasive discourse can teach him or her how he or she is expected to behave, as well as inform others how they are expected to interact with the "delinquent identity". Throughout this process, the action-supplement relationship becomes increasingly restrictive until the most benign actions are imbued with malevolence. It is out of this process that both adolescent and parents (or other interlocutors) construct a story or narrative with which they render their experiences intelligible to others and to themselves (Sarbin, 1984). The self-narrative or identity of "delinquency" is therefore co-constructed by the adolescent in communication with others in order to make sense out of their lived experience (White & Epston, 1990). Identity is thus a discursive practice and it is the effects of this discourse that assume importance from a social constructionist stance.

Nonetheless, we are not chained to one self-narrative, doomed to interact with the world in the same way, across all contexts, for the rest of our lives. As our actions are supplemented differently, and as we move between various diverse contexts, our reservoir of potential supplements increases and diversifies. As we experience others and ourselves differently it is out of these rich contexts that our potential for multiple selves, and thereby multiple self-narratives, emerges (Gergen, 1996; 1999). As an example, a delinquent might be defined as rebellious by his or her parents and the law, however the adolescent's actions will be supplemented differently by friends, thereby leading to the creation of a different self-narrative or identity. Within the context of his or her friends the adolescent might be defined as loyal and trustworthy.

It might seem obvious at this stage that no one way of interacting or one self-narrative will have equal utility across diverse contexts. Consequently, to be able to do only one "relational dance" will serve to inhibit and undermine the quality of interactional scenarios. For example, to be stuck within the self-narrative of "delinquency" and to interact in such a way that is consistent with this narrative, across all contexts might lead to problematic outcomes for the adolescent. Rebellious behaviour might be construed as an indication that the adolescent is preparing to leave home and might thus serve to benefit him or her in this regard. Nonetheless, to engage in the same behaviour in a new job would probably eventually lead to the adolescent losing his or her job.

From this example, one can surmise that rebellion might be appropriate in some contexts whilst not in others. As an adolescent reaches maturity and starts to prepare to leave home, rebellious behaviour may be appropriate as he or she attempts to separate from his or her family of origin and to develop his or her own ideas and values (Haley, 1980). However, rebellious behaviour displayed across all contexts will be inappropriate. Consider the example of the work situation illustrated above in this regard. It is thus of benefit to the individual to be proficient in multiple self-narratives as it enhances his or her capacity to achieve satisfying interpersonal relationships.

2.4 Some Thoughts on Social Constructionist Therapy

So what might a social constructionist approach to therapy look like? It should be clear from the foregoing that the therapist would not presume to be dealing with pathology contained within the adolescent. In fact, any modernist "objective" consideration of both pathology and health is entirely obliterated. Both pathology and health are discursive achievements that invite particular forms of action (Lax, 1992). The same can be said for the discourse of "delinquency", "causation", "cure" and "identity". For example, the assumption that delinquency is a problem caused by poor parenting invites solutions consistent with this assumption. A possible treatment approach might thus be to reproach, blame or teach the parents. Thus, the therapist might ask what forms of action are invited by the discourses utilised by those defining the "problem". In fact, the therapist will also consider what forms of action are invited by his or her own approach or discourse regarding the "problem", thereby assuming a self-reflexive stance.

Discussions regarding "delinquency", "identity" and "problem resolution" are conceptualised as conversational resources that are used by individuals within the context of their situated activities (McNamee, 1996). It is thus discourse itself that is open to investigation and challenge.

A concern of social constructionism is how a particular way of talking or acting is sustained and rendered viable within a particular interactive moment. A focal area would be the ways in which interlocutors join so as potentiate and constrain certain ways of talking or acting. For example, talk of "delinquency" generally excludes considerations of "good will". Therefore, the emphasis shifts to the forms and patterns of relatedness.

Consequently, narratives are developed in therapy to describe how certain actions or utterances are supplemented, as well as to consider the utility engendered by particular ways of interacting in specific ways in specific contexts

(Gergen, 1994). The focus shifts to a conversation about supplementing actions differently, both in the therapy room and outside, so that new meaning is brought to the conversational domain. Multiple identities (how actions are supplemented differently in different contexts thereby engendering different meanings and a different conception of the self) are explored and interactional stances useful and conducive to context are retained. A concise summary is provided by McNamee (1996): "Postmodern therapy attempts to achieve a conversational domain where participants begin to supplement their own and each other's behaviour in ways that allow failures, difficulties, and problems, as well as successes, to be recognised as *relational accomplishments*" (p.152). Thus, through the therapeutic conversation wherein the therapist asks questions that highlight relational patterns, both therapist and client create a story about the ways in which the client supplements the actions of others, and the ways in which others reciprocate. It is through this process that the relational nature of problems is accentuated, so that the client can take responsibility for how he or she supplements his or her own, as well as another's behaviour.

Of course, this focus will not be of equal utility across all therapeutic contexts. This is especially so when the person presenting for therapy is an unwilling participant, which is often the case when the identified patient is an adolescent. It is thus in these cases that it is even more imperative to include in therapy as many people as possible who are involved in defining the problem. Through the therapeutic conversation, they will be in a position to consider the problem as a relational accomplishment and consequently will be able to supplement the actions of the identified patient differently. By virtue of supplementing this behaviour differently, they inadvertently participate in creating an identity that is less deviant or different. This then constitutes a reciprocal invitation to interact with the new "identity" in a way that sustains and maintains that behaviour.

2.5 The example of Mrs A and Jack

In Chapter 3 the case of Mrs A and her son Jack was considered from the perspective of second order cybernetics. However, how would this case be considered from a social constructionist stance? Would a therapeutic scenario be much different from a second order approach? If not, what is useful about considering the social construction of "delinquency"?

Jack is the defined delinquent who rebels against his mother, Mrs A. Within the therapeutic context, the therapist would be wondering about the ways they supplement each other's actions – how is it that they bring meaning to what they each do in the relationship? These meanings would be considered within the light of broader cultural discourses, thereby providing an opportunity for challenging the assumptions underlying how Jack and his mother think about the problem as they each define it.

Ideas about the problem are co-constructed within the context of the relationship between Mrs A and Jack. Consider as an example the following scenario.

Jack has been told to be home by 00:00. However, at 02:00 his mother is awake and is becoming increasingly worried. Jack arrives home at 05:00. He attempts to sneak into the house, hoping that his mother is fast asleep and therefore oblivious to the time. He knows that he is going to be in trouble if she finds out how late he is. However, Mrs A has been sitting at the kitchen table waiting for her son for the past five hours. She hears a key scratching in the lock followed by the soft creaking of the door. She initially feels relieved that her son is safe. However, anger slowly creeps in as she contemplates the possible reasons for her son's tardiness. She is propelled to confront him.

Jack receives a fright when he sees his mother. She looks awful, a mixture of anger and sheer panic. He looks guilty as he stares at her wearing a sheepish look on his face. The impression is immediately created for Mrs A that Jack was

sneaking and is now feeling "caught out". "Where the hell have you been?" Mrs A asks, making no effort to hide her anger (supplementing his action in such a way as to define it as a deliberate attempt at rebelling against her). "I'm so sorry mom, Mike's car broke down and we had to wait for ages for the AA to come. I would have phoned you but I thought that you would be asleep and I didn't want to wake and worry you", replies Jack softly (disconfirming Mrs A's meaning, supplementing her utterance with the meaning that he was not rebelling but is late due to circumstances beyond his control).

Of course, there are many other factors that will also impinge on this conversation. Pertinent examples include the history of the relationship, Mrs A's assumptions about the kind of person Jack is (that is, his identity), and ways in which Mrs A and Jack have previously learned to supplement interactions such as this. If Jack has been late ten times previously and each time he has prepared an excuse, Jack may lose credibility in the eyes of his mother and she may refuse to believe him, reconfirming her initial supplement that he was rebelling against her. However, if it is the first time that it has happened, Mrs A might accept Jack's apology. Nonetheless, consider the ramifications if Mr and Mrs A were divorced due to Mr A's unfaithfulness, a fact which he initially lied about and tried to "cover up". In this case, Mrs A might be suspicious of such "stories" and her repertoire of supplements may not include acceptance in scenarios such as these. Consequently, Mrs A may yet again reconfirm her initial meaning, that Jack is attempting to rebel against her (as well as developing other meanings, such as labelling Jack a liar).

It does not really matter whether Jack is justified in coming home late, or whether his mother is justified in shouting at him. What assumes importance is how they supplement each other's behaviour. Mrs A may supplement Jack's behaviour in such as way as to define him as a rebel (therefore the problem is that her son is rebellious and "out of control"). Further, Jack may supplement his mother's behaviour such as to define her as "ridiculous" or "pathetic" with statements such as "There you go again, always over-reacting, I'm only a couple of minutes late!"

This pattern develops into a redundant pattern of interaction as they attempt to solve the problem consistent with how they each define it. Through this process they are both defined in their respective roles and the reciprocal relationship between the meaning-making processes on a micro–level, and prevalent cultural discourses operating at the macro–level, contribute to the development of this redundancy. Mrs A may begin to interact with Jack in terms of her assumptions about rebellious youth, an image informed by the dominant discourse. In this way it is ensured that such a meaning is engendered, translating into a broader pattern of interaction. Similarly, Jack may associate his mother with the discourse pertaining to the typical "over-involved mother", thereby interacting with an image thereby created. It is thus clear that both micro-level and macro-level processes have contributed to the development of the defined problem. However, how is this dealt with in the therapeutic context?

The ecosystemic and social constructionist stances have many striking similarities. In fact, within the context of therapy, the practical aspects of the therapy session will be very similar – the focus will be on relationships between interlocutors. Furthermore, since the role of language has become salient within ecosystemic or second order thinking, both approaches will concern themselves with the meanings that both clients and therapists bring to the therapeutic endeavour. However, it is the way in which the therapist conceptualises interpersonal relationships which differs slightly. Social constructionism is concerned both with the micro-level meaning-making process (how client's supplement their own as well as each other's behaviour), as well as the influence of the broader cultural discourses. Ecosystemic therapy focuses primarily on broader patterns of interaction. Constructionism, like an ecosystemic epistemology, also emphasises that stable forms of participation constitute what one thinks, says, does, imagines, and feels. In addition, social constructionism does not attempt to do away with the concept of causality as does ecosystemic epistemology – instead it is acknowledged that the notion of causality is such a prevalent discourse in our society that we cannot imagine our lives without it. This discourse is thus utilised insofar as it is useful for therapy. However, in

both ecosystemic epistemology and social constructionism the modernist belief that there is an absolute truth independent of the human mind is renounced. Nonetheless, within social constructionism it is acknowledged that we can speak of co-constructed truths and the "truth discourse", which has very real effects on our lives. However, the stance of social constructionism also considers both social constructionism and ecosystemic epistemology to be discourses; consequently both (as well as other discourses) are invited to the table of therapy in the enterprise to locate that which is useful. One should therefore not exclude a certain way of thinking, even a modernist approach might be deemed useful within a particular context. Flexibility such as this is encouraged within the social constructionist stance. Social constructionism thus adds to the ecosystemic approach, adding to the rich descriptions that can be generated from with the "new paradigm". The ecosystemic or the second order approach adds to social constructionism with its stronger emphasis on patterns of transaction. Incorporating the social constructionist stance expands one's repertoire of possible supplements within the therapeutic context.

3. Can delinquency theory and culturally prevalent discourses really influence the way we think?

In Chapter 2, theories of delinquency were distinguished by their epistemological foundations. The assumptions of three epistemological traditions were made overt: modernist, first order cybernetics, and second order cybernetics. One of the defining differences between these epistemologies is their assumption regarding causation. It is thus useful at this juncture to speak about the discourse of causation. The position that one takes within this discourse, for example linear versus circular causality, has implications for how we see problems and how we interact with them. It was made clear in the foregoing discussion that the way in which one interacts with a problem has an effect on the construction of that problem. Effectively then, the discourse of causation has

profound ramifications for the creation and maintenance of problems in our society.

As the reader might recall, within modernist approaches the individual is identified as the source of the problem and therefore in need of cure. Causes for delinquency are sought so that the problem can be explained and ameliorated. The following anecdote is illustrative in this regard.

Lisa, a 15 year old adolescent, was identified by her parents as a problem child when she was ten years of age. Initially, Lisa began "acting out" at home. She refused to attend school and complete her chores, and then began "forgetting" to complete her homework. The level of Lisa's schoolwork began to drop and her worried teacher called her parents in for a meeting. As a result, the parents began to put more pressure on her to behave in a way consistent with the family's values. However, her parents became exasperated as they found that the more they tried to control Lisa, the more rebellious she became. It was at this time that her parents recalled that Lisa's maternal grandmother had been diagnosed with ADHD when she was seven years of age. They thus hypothesised that Lisa must have inherited a genetic problem from her grandmother. This, they believed, could explain the disruptive behaviour. Consistent with this idea, they felt that they had no other option but to take Lisa to a psychiatrist so that she could be given medication. Nonetheless, Lisa protested vehemently and consequently ran away. Her parents began a search for her and found her in a local commune, a place notorious for drug trafficking. She was taken almost immediately to the psychiatrist who diagnosed her with severe conduct disorder and ADHD and prescribed medication. Lisa is currently in a juvenile prison since she was convicted of shoplifting whilst in possession of dagga.

It is clear from this anecdote that the problem was regarded as residing within Lisa. Lisa thus needed to be changed and controlled, an outcome of the way in which both the teacher and Lisa's parents conceptualised the problem. It is also

evident that Lisa's parents were influenced by the medical model in the way that they thought about the problem. In fact, their actions may also have contributed to the perpetuation of that model (by visiting a psychiatrist who was a strong advocate of the medical model and possibly through their conversations with others about the problem).

Should the family have visited a systemic or social constructionist therapist, then Lisa would not have been the sole focus of therapy. Rather, the functioning of the family as a whole would have been taken into account, so that the meanings maintaining the problematic behaviour could be highlighted and thereby changed. The approach to the "problem" as well as its resolution would have been completely different.

4. A Research Example

Once one is equipped with the "language" of social constructionism one can construct a hypothesis about how particular definitions of people or labels are co-created within the context of ongoing relationships. In the current chapter, the social construction of delinquency has been elucidated. What follows is a critical examination of an article embedded in the epistemology of linearity. The critique is informed by social constructionism and is employed specifically to illuminate the inherent flaws of an empirical approach to research. The author will demonstrate how a social constructionist perspective subverts the notion that an objective reality can be accessed by way of rigorously applying empirical research and suggests that the epistemology which this particular article exemplifies, participates in creating the very phenomena (i.e. reality) for which solutions are formulated.

The following research example has been selected since it largely reflects the majority of the research that has been undertaken concerning delinquency. In general, studies attempt to uncover causative factors in the endeavour to

illuminate the path to eradicating this "problem" (Clark & Shields, 1997; Dilalla & Gottesman, 1989; Gove & Crutchfield, 1982; Levy, 1997; Rowe & Flannery, 1994; Warr, 1993). In this sense, the example is no different from other empirical research in that it also rests on the assumptions of modernism.

Calabrese and Adams (1990) explored the relationship between alienation and delinquency. They hypothesized that incarcerated adolescents would be more alienated than their peers in public schools. Alienation could thus explain the difference between delinquents and non-delinquents.

For the study alienation was defined as "an emotional state brought about by environmental and/or economic conditions" (Calabrese & Adams, 1990, p. 435) and was broken down into the following facets – feelings of powerlessness (inability to control factors in one's life), isolation (separation from significant others), meaninglessness (lack of purpose in one's life or work) and normlessness (rejection of societal norms).

Calabrese and Adams (1990) thus administered the Dean Alienation Scale to 157 male incarcerated adolescents and 1318 public school adolescents. This scale was chosen since the researchers argued that it provides a global measure of alienation and does not reflect the relationship between adolescents and their immediate environment.

The results showed that the "delinquents" had significantly higher levels of total alienation, isolation and powerlessness. Consistent with these results the researchers argued for the implementation of the following solutions:

1. Higher alienation scores could reflect a failure on the part of the juvenile justice system to rehabilitate juvenile offenders. Thus the system should focus on the causes of alienation, isolation and powerlessness so that they might reduce the rate of recidivism.

2. The high level of isolation might reflect an inability to form a trusting relationship with others. Therefore, the need to learn trust is essential to reducing alienation and deviant behaviour. Since the home environments of these adolescents may not be conducive to the learning of trust, schools and social organizations may be able to prevent youngsters developing into delinquents through emphasising the importance of developing trusting relationships. This responsibility is also extended to the juvenile correctional facilities where the focus should shift to building trust, resilience and cooperation.

However, although the research presents itself as objective and thus as reflective of the truth, it is clear that it is informed by a modernist epistemology. As was articulated in Chapters 2 and 3, the search for a cause is one of the quintessential features of modernism. The present article assumes that specific causes of delinquency can be unearthed and it is the prevalence of these causes that directly causes the emergence of the problem. In this case, the particular causative factor is alienation. The assumption of linear causality thus informs the research design.

Furthermore, it is presumed that causative factors can be broken down into smaller units – alienation is one factor among many other possible factors. However, in the present study, the concept of "alienation" is broken down into smaller units – isolation, helplessness and meaninglessness. Exploring the relationship between these units and delinquency can inform the researcher about the constituents of delinquency. Moreover, although both delinquency and alienation are abstract concepts they are both treated as real entities by the researchers. Within the study alienation is measured using a scale. This process suggests that alienation is a real entity that can be accurately measured and studied "out there" in the real world. "Delinquency" is identified as a problem that really exists within the real world. The concept of reductionism is thus a guiding principle of this research.

Another assumption consistent with modernist ideals that permeates the research process is that of objectivity. The researchers assume that alienation can be measured in its true form by the scale utilized. The research process is not considered in and of itself to influence the scores obtained and any other influences are considered to be extraneous variables that the researchers were unable to control. The scale thus accurately measures "something" called "alienation" which is or is not contained within each adolescent. The researchers' opinions or ideas are not considered to influence the research process as the researchers assume that they are detached from that which they observe. It is this very detachment that is a prerequisite for an objective, scientific observation.

It is also assumed that the language used to describe the research is neutral and value free. It does not influence the reader in any other way than as to present the facts. It is therefore free of rhetoric and merely conveys the truth about "alienation" and "delinquency" as discovered through the experimental design. Language is thereby endowed with the capacity to mirror a reality "out there" (Gergen, 1999).

It is also clear that the modernist conceptualisation of the "problem" implies solutions that are consistent with this paradigm. If alienation causes delinquency, the attempts to reconnect the delinquent with others will have the effect of alleviating the problem. Yet again therefore, the relationship between solution and cure is a linear one. Furthermore, because it is considered possible to come to know the world "as it is" through empirical investigation, it is also possible to control particular aspects of that world. Thus, manipulating alienation levels through, for example, the building of trust will directly have an effect on delinquency. One can therefore directly control its reduction. It is hence possible for one person to have unilateral control over another.

As one might anticipate, a social constructionist view of this research is illustrative of the social constructionist departure from modernist ideals. As discussed in Chapter 2, social constructionism renounces these modernist

assumptions. "Delinquency" and "alienation" are abstract concepts, not real entities located within the world "out there". They are each co-constructed in language within the context of ongoing relationships and consequently do not exist other than through the ways in which they are reflected in this language. Implied is that it is the ways in which people interact with each other which foster the development of such definitions. As a result, the concept of delinquency is negotiated through the way the interlocutors interact with each other and is hence not a pathology to be found within the mind of the adolescent. In a similar vein, alienation is not a characteristic of the adolescent but is rather located within the language practices of those defining delinquency as a problem.

Thus, one cannot capture "delinquency" by focusing solely on the adolescent. Such a focus would fail to include the interactional processes that operate to sustain the definition. Earlier in the chapter it was considered how the label of "delinquency" is maintained through the redundant relationship dynamics between action and supplement. Focusing on the adolescent defined as a delinquent would ignore the ways in which individuals interact with each other so as to participate within the co-creation of "delinquency".

Furthermore, the co-construction of "alienation" is also ignored. It is constructed as a cause of "delinquency", yet after its construction it is assumed to exist objectively rather than being yet another co-constructed definition. In fact, the discourse of causation is itself a co-construction that the discussed research considers to be an objective fact. What means are available which would be able to prove the truth about causation? The question never arises as to whether "delinquency" causes "alienation", or how one can ascertain the nature of the relationship between two concepts. From a social constructionist perspective, it would be more practical to question the utility of such an assumption whilst recognising that it does not represent the objective truth.

Nonetheless, from a social constructionist perspective alienation and delinquency cannot be studied in isolation. Rather, the focus would be relocated from an

individualist stance to a relational stance. The researcher would be interested in how delinquency is co-constructed between people, as well as how the relationship between "alienation" and "delinquency" is co-constructed. The focus thereby shifts to relational patterns of interaction.

In short, a critique of the research by Calabrese and Adams (1990) is that it rips "alienation" and "delinquency" out of context. It does not attempt to locate the contextual factors that foster the development of delinquency and feelings of alienation. It thus does not allow for contextual variation. It assumes that one always feels equally alienated and that one can assume only a delinquent identity.

Congruent with these assumptions alienation can be measured with a scale, as if it is an isolated characteristic contained within an individual. However, this scale cannot capture contextual variations and provides a stable alienation score for the individual completing the scale. When one considers the fluidity of human interaction the shortcomings of using such a scale become apparent.

Furthermore, the influential role of the testing context is ignored. The effect that the testing situation might have on eliciting feelings of "alienation" within the individual is not explored. Adolescents who already feel rejected by bureaucratic organisations are likely to feel alienated through a testing process that accentuates distance and power differentials. The adolescent who is incarcerated is likely to see the tester as an authority figure and is therefore likely to respond in ways that he or she typically utilises in such contexts – distancing himself or herself from authority whilst feeling powerless to do anything else due to his or her incarceration. The test is therefore capturing the adolescents' response to the tester and testing situation rather than any internal and stable characteristic referred to as "alienation".

Through this co-construction it is clear that those defined as delinquent would be shown to have higher alienation scores. Consequently the results of the

research contribute even further to constructing these adolescents as delinquent. The research thus reifies "delinquency" and "alienation" through the questions that are asked based on the modernist assumptions of the researcher. It is not considered how the relationship between the tester, the testing situation and the adolescent contributed to creating these definitions. Consequently, the adolescent is revealed as one with the stable identity of "delinquent" which is related to a stable characteristic of "alienation". Ways in which different contexts might elicit different behaviour from the adolescent inconsistent with the pre-conceived definitions are ignored.

Furthermore, since alienation is already assumed to cause delinquency before the commencement of the research, the preconceived ideas of the researchers had a profound influence on the research question as well as the manner in which it was to be tested (Gergen, 1978). The way in which alienation should be defined was clearly set out prior to the research. This definition was also reflected in the scale utilised. Subjects were therefore not free to participate in co-constructing how alienation feels for them. Instead they were forced to consider alternatives constrained by the definition imposed by the researchers. In addition to this, the adolescents were not provided the opportunity of redefining what they believe is a cause of delinquency. Their thinking was thus guided by the initial hypothesis of the researchers and their responses might thus not capture their own sentiments regarding alienation and delinquency. The hypothesis was in this way self-fulfilling as the results reflect the thinking of the researchers more than anything related to "alienation" and "delinquency". The researcher defined prior to the research those aspect of the research process which were to count as facts as well as how these facts are to be distinguished from each other (Gergen, 1978).

The assumption that it is possible to observe objectively without influencing the results is thus shown to be a fallacy. The interests of the researcher always influence that which is researched – both in terms of the phenomena to be focused on and the results that are likely to be obtained.

Considered from a social constructionist perspective, the research illustrates the powerful influence of context on the outcome of research. It could be hypothesised that those defined as delinquent would have higher alienation scores in the context of a testing process which approximates the type of context in which they already feel alienated, rejected and misunderstood. Those adolescents who have not had their behaviour supplemented in this way in such a context would be expected to have lower alienation scores. The research therefore is more reflective of context than of the relationship between "alienation" and "delinquency".

It is clear from the above that research emanating from within the social constructionist paradigm should be reflective of social constructionist principles (Steier, 1991). The researcher does not attempt to "find" something, but is rather actively co-constructing "reality" by way of collaborating with the research participants who are perceived as co-authors from a constructionist stance. The researcher would thus not define prior to the research endeavour what the experience of the participants should be, but would rather co-create these experiences through his or her conversations with the participants. The researcher would initially acknowledge that "delinquency" is a term co-created in discourse that has no other reality than the way in which people language about it. However, how would the social constructionist researcher proceed?

Since realities are co-constructed, the researcher can never access another's "true" ideas about what they believe causes delinquency. Thus the search for cause is a futile one. Rather, the constructionist researcher would be interested in the story told by the adolescent that renders his or her life intelligible. Nonetheless, the researcher would be continuously aware that the type of questions asked as well as the manner in which they are spoken would influence the response rendered by the adolescent participant. The researcher is thus required to become self-reflexive, becoming aware of the ways in which his or her ideas influence the research process. Questions can be asked in such a way

as to locate the problem within the adolescent such that he or she feels blamed (for example, what role does your disregard for the rules of society have on your decision to disobey all authority figures?). However, questions can also be asked which accentuate relational factors, such that the problem is relocated from inside the adolescent to the contextual factors sustaining the problem (for example, what was the effect of your stealing on your parents? How did that change the way that they related to you?). In short, the narrative or story is co-created by the researcher and participant. Questions that emphasise relationships can imply new ways of seeing and dealing with the problem.

As a result, the researcher cannot have a unilateral effect on the research participants (and vice versa). Each question is an intervention and consequently, the researcher cannot take an objective position outside of the research context. It thus follows that the research process can be a therapeutic process whilst it can also have detrimental results should it emphasise blame through the types of questions that are asked. The research process thus unfolds as both researcher and participant co-create a story that implies its own solutions.

5. Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been on elucidating a social constructionist stance on delinquency. Social constructionist epistemology is still within its early stages of development and consequently there has been as yet no social constructionist perspective on delinquency. This chapter presents an initial exploration in this regard and does not purport to present a fully articulated stance. Its assertions may at times appear mostly speculative as the author travels into unfamiliar terrain. It is suggested that as the next stage in this evolution it would be useful to undertake social constructionist research so that the concepts and ideas developed within this chapter can be pragmatically applied as these socially constructed ideas are widened to include the ideas of adolescents and their families.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDING NEW BEGINNINGS

1. Considerations about the Socially Constructed nature of "Delinquency": A self-reflexive stance

If we cannot escape discourse, then there is no way of knowing that what has appeared on these pages is true. Does this constitute *the* social construction of delinquency? Surely not, it is one perspective among many possible useful conceptions. What has been rendered fits with my own understanding of delinquency, and may not always resonate with the reader's conceptualisation. My own ideas have been influenced by my participation within previous relational contexts and the ways in which I have supplemented others as well as my own behaviour. Further, the ways in which others have supplemented my attempts at rebellion have influenced my understanding of both rebellion and delinquency. This is also not to undermine the effects of the dominant cultural discourses that have contributed to my growing understanding of what it means to be a delinquent. This chapter is therefore the product of a co-constructed dialogue between the world I live in, and me.

This thus constitutes an approach, which is useful to me. It is up to the reader to take from this dissertation that which he or she might find useful, and to discard those aspects which are not. It has to be acknowledged from a social constructionist stance that there is no right or correct way of seeing something; there is therefore by implication no correct social constructionist perspective on delinquency. My interest has been placed primarily on the micro level of human functioning, the domain where meaning is negotiated between people, as it is this level that is most salient to me in my life. However, whilst writing it was also

useful for me to consider the ways in which the dominant discourses have influenced my own ideas about delinquency. Nonetheless, another author might choose to focus more on discourse. It is thus evident that my discussion of the social constructionist paradigm has also been influenced by my own personal choices, and is therefore not the only way to see it. In fact, the same can be said for the entire dissertation, it is my own personal investment into the field of psychology, and delinquency in particular. It represents an endeavour to include more voices within the ambit of therapy, to be less pathologising in our ways of communicating with others. Most importantly, it is an attempt to take cognisance of the importance of accepting responsibility for the roles we each play in contributing to the defined problems within our society. It is once we become aware of what we do and the assumptions underlying the choices we make that we are able to do something different.

2. Future Recommendations

The author has endeavoured to present a different way of thinking about "delinquency" than has traditionally been the case. Modernist theories have generally located the "problem" within the adolescent although theories such as the social learning approach have acknowledged the causative role of environmental factors. Nonetheless, the assumption of linear causality has been upheld. Treatment approaches implied by such an epistemological stance have focused on uncovering causative factors. The systemic approach ushered in a new way of conceptualising delinquency, locating the problem within familial interactional patterns whilst simultaneously stressing the operation of circular causal loops. Both the social constructionist and the ecosystemic approaches have relocated the "problem" to being perpetuated in language and within the meaning-making systems of those "in language" about the "problem". Social constructionism has extended this theorising to acknowledge the effect that dominant discourses have on the way people think about themselves that the

world around them. However, what recommendations does a social constructionist approach have for future treatment and research?

2.1 Research

To dictate the type as well as the focus that research should take would be incongruent with the assumptions of social constructionism since research is co-created between people. Nonetheless, if the principles of constructionism are to be taken seriously then these principles must also be applied by researchers to themselves and their research (Steier, 1991). Thus, future research needs to be based on social constructionist principles. In this sense, the goal is not to find the "truth" about "delinquency", but to co-construct it with the research participants. The focus needs to shift from a concern with uncovering the truth to one that assesses the utility of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the light of the current dissertation it would be useful to conduct research that highlights the co-constructed nature of "delinquency". Such research has an influence on all research participants and thus would already begin to change the "problem", thereby implying different alternatives in which the focus shifts to all those participating in constructing "delinquency".

2.2 Treatment

Within a similar vein treatment should also be based on social constructionist assumptions. "Delinquency" needs to be treated as a construct created in language rather than a term that refers to an objective reality. "Delinquency" is a particular definition that has been co-created by interlocutors in a relational context (Gergen, 1994). Treatment needs to acknowledge this co-constructed nature so that it does not contribute to reifying the "problem".

Consequently, the focus of treatment should not be maintained on the adolescent. It should be extended to consider the participative role of other interlocutors as well as the constitutive effects of dominant discourses (Lowe, 1991; White & Epston, 1990). Therapy thus becomes a language event as particular ways of languaging about the "problem" that define it as such becomes apparent (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; 1992). Treatment thus needs to focus on the ways in which the problem is defined in language so that the meanings sustaining the "problem" can be challenged through re-defining it and focusing on its relational embeddedness (Gergen & Kaye, 1992).

Nonetheless, social constructionism represents a therapeutic stance that does not dictate the practicalities of what should be done within each individual therapy session. Rather, the therapist is free to choose among many different therapeutic approaches so long as he or she remains cognisant that the terms utilised are themselves socially constructed. Thus, there is no one "right" way of doing therapy. However, the focus should shift to a concern with utility. Once the therapist is emancipated from having to choose the most "correct" therapeutic approach, he or she can then chose and experiment with different approaches which may or may not be useful. Those deemed not useful in any particular therapy can be discarded and another approach or perspective can be chosen in its stead. Yet again this process is co-constructed as both client and therapist contribute to the evolution of the therapeutic process. Consequently, the results of therapy are also co-constructed.

3. Concluding Comments

The traditional approach to dealing with adolescent's defined as delinquent has been to locate the problem inside the adolescent. As a result, the solution has most often been to isolate the adolescent so that he or she can be changed. The implication is that he or she is defected. Is it not ironic that a young person who already feels "different", "unacceptable" and feels that he or she does not belong

is treated in such a way that confirms this perception? This dissertation has thus explored a different way of conceptualising delinquency, one in which adolescents and their families are not pathologised and thereby presenting alternative ways of dealing with the "problem" as it is defined.

Blame is a natural outgrowth of locating the source of the problem unilaterally. A social constructionist approach relocates the source of the "problem" so that blame is not a logical derivative that constitutes a solution to the "problem". As a result, adolescents as well as their families are free to tell their own stories of their experiences and each is legitimised as valid and true for them. Consequently, solutions based on the need to defend the "self" against "attack" are no longer required and participants are freed to consider how they each participate in maintaining their own misery and despair as they reinvigorate their experiences with new meaning. As interlocutors are no longer condemned to re-enact the redundant interactional patterns sustained by these meanings they are endowed with the potential to carve a new trajectory upon the template of life. With these thoughts in mind, an old Chinese proverb echoes the belief that change is always possible, "Traveller there are no paths, paths are made by travelling."

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